

The 53 Biggest Self-Publishing Mistakes *and How to Avoid Them*

Andrew Chapman

www.SelfPubSmart.com

• **PRINTER-FRIENDLY VERSION** •
KINDLE VERSION AVAILABLE ON AMAZON.COM

SHARE THIS E-BOOK!

Please share this e-book with others
you think may benefit from it.

The conditions of this license (to share) are simple:

1. You do not alter the material in any way.
2. You do not charge or profit from the material in any way.

The 53 Biggest Self-Publishing Mistakes and How to Avoid Them
Copyright © 2011 by Andrew Chapman

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be used or reproduced in any manner whatsoever without written permission, except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical articles and reviews.

Andrew Chapman Media
www.AChapman.com

Second edition
Produced in the United States of America

Contents

Author's Note.....	iv
Preface.....	iv
Introduction.....	vi
Design & Production Mistakes.....	1
1: Bad title.....	1
2: Bad cover.....	2
3: Going font crazy.....	2
4: Not having enough white space on the page.....	3
5: Putting “By” in front of your name.....	3
6: Not having an ISBN or bar code.....	3
7: Not having a title on the spine.....	4
8: Misspelling “foreword”.....	5
9: Not including extra space for your gutters.....	5
10: Setting up all pages as right-side pages.....	5
11: Having an inconsistent layout.....	6
12: Hiring a designer without book-design experience.....	6
13: Not putting your manuscript in the best format for its purpose and audience.....	6
Printing Mistakes.....	8
14: Printing too many copies of your book.....	8
15: Confusing print-on-demand (POD), vanity publishing, and self-publishing.....	8
16: Printing your book on thin paper.....	9
17: Using a cover paper stock that is likely to curl.....	9
18: Your book being glossy coated on both sides of the cover.....	9
19: Going digital when you should go offset and vice versa.....	10
20: Not getting several price quotes.....	10
21: Not getting price quotes from all over the United States, and potentially the world.....	10
22: Thinking all printers are, or can be, book printers.....	11
23: Not having a model to show the printer.....	12
24: Not carefully reviewing the proof of your book.....	12
25: Getting a comb or spiral binding.....	13
Promotional Mistakes.....	14
26: Not doing something every day to promote.....	14
27: Not being newsworthy.....	14
28: Waiting until your book is published to start promoting.....	15
29: Not knowing your target market or not even having one.....	16
30: Doing book signings instead of book <i>events</i>	17
31: Ignoring non-traditional markets and non-bookstore sales.....	18

Miscellaneous Mistakes.....	19
32: Mis-pricing your book.....	19
33: Not hiring an editor <i>and</i> proofreader	20
34: Not joining publishing-related groups	21
35: Getting a merchant account too soon	21
36: Not repurposing your content.....	22
Special Section: Subsidy Publishing Mistakes	23
37: Not examining the company’s business model and how they profit.....	23
38: Forgetting that your publishing venture is a <i>business</i>	25
39: Failing to assess how many copies you’ll realistically sell	25
40: Not knowing your goal and purpose for getting published.....	27
41: Not test-marketing <i>first</i>	28
42: Not being able to set your book’s price.....	29
43: Not carefully considering the cost per unit.....	30
44: Overlooking or downplaying the difficulty getting into bookstores.....	30
45: Failing to check if you have final choice over look and format.....	30
46: Using their assigned ISBN versus your own	31
47: Failing to thoroughly review the contract.....	31
48: Not seeing if they have an offset option for higher print runs.....	32
49: Not understanding your payment—“author profit” vs. “royalties” vs. “net payment”	33
50: Thinking you’ll get good media reviews	33
51: Not researching the company on Amazon.com	34
52: Failing to contact some of the publisher’s authors	35
53: Ignoring that <i>you</i> are responsible for marketing.....	36
One Last Big Tip.....	37
Conclusion.....	38
About the Author	40

Author's Note

Although I use the term “book” throughout this e-book, some of the advice within these mistakes can apply to any published product—audio book, e-book, video, booklet, and so on. So, keep your blinders off as you're reading these pages, as some aspects may apply to other products. For a short discussion of branching out into other published products, see Mistake #36.

Preface

The term *self-publishing* has largely changed (erroneously, in my opinion) to include three formerly segregated forms of publishing: vanity publishing, subsidy publishing, and true self-publishing. To further confuse things, some people are now using the term *independent publishing* synonymously with self-publishing, while the term *POD publishing* is also being used in the mix. (POD stands for “print on demand,” which is a print technology apart from the form of publishing; any publisher can use POD and many of all sizes do.) So, given the misunderstandings among aspiring authors, as well as the misinformation out there, I think it's important to set some definitions straight before we go further into this book.

True self-publishing only means two key things—(1) the author or author's publishing company owns the International Standard Book Number (ISBN) for her book; (2) she has *complete* and *ultimate* control over her book's creation, promotion, and distribution. That's it. If another entity owns the ISBN or has final say over some aspect of the book, then it's not self-publishing. It's that simple. Of course, the author can contract out some of these responsibilities (including writing the book!)—and most certainly will, at least with the printing—but she will have executive powers through the life of the book. She can change it at will, assign rights to whomever she chooses, and terminate the book if ever that became the right thing to do.

Vanity publishing, the most malicious form of publishing, differs in that the author is duped into paying ridiculous fees to have his book published, often paying a five-figure sum for a full print run of books that are priced too high to sell. (I had one author approach me for help earlier this year who'd been bilked out of over \$20,000 by a vanity publisher.) Of course, no vanity publishing company refers to itself as such, due to the stigma—so they call themselves self-publishing companies. The only way you'll know you're dealing with a vanity publisher is by looking at the totality of the arrangement. The red flags I raise in the “Subsidy Publishing Mistakes” section of this book will be aplenty with a vanity publisher. With just a little knowledge and savvy, you'll have no problem avoiding these scams.

An independent publisher is simply one that is not part of a corporate conglomerate. So, while independent publishing does include, by definition, the multitude of self-publishers, it also includes many non-self-publishers. Some of these are well-known companies (or at least some of their books are well known), such as Wiley, Career Press, O'Reilly Media, and Hay House. (Tim O'Reilly and Louise Hay are authors through their companies, but they aren't the only authors.) Conversely, the famous trade publishers in New York City, such as Penguin, St. Martin's Press, and Hyperion, have corporate parent companies that may dictate some aspect of their business.

Last, we have subsidy publishers. And in some ways, these are the ones most likely to get you in trouble. Why? Because unlike vanity presses, subsidy publishers can be affordable and they are proliferating. Their methods of profit, whether malicious or not, are also more subtle. The devil is in the details. This is not to say they are all bad, just that they can be. Unlike with vanity publishers, where your primary risk is losing a ton of money, with subsidy publishers your most likely risk is a book that's unsellable. Of course, if that were to occur you'd waste money in the process, but usually not

as much as with a vanity press. So, because the numbers of subsidy publishers are growing seemingly daily, and because an online search for “self-publishing” will yield many subsidy publisher results, I felt it was important to include a special section toward the end of this book devoted to the biggest mistakes in subsidy publishing. This is the greatest gray area of danger I’m seeing for new and aspiring authors—but it’s also where informed authors can do well for themselves. Subsidy publishing serves a useful purpose, as long as you are aware of its minefield.

Finally, even if you plan to use or are using a subsidy publisher (“hiring a self-publishing company”), make yourself familiar with all of the mistakes in this book. Most of them apply whether you are truly self-publishing or going the subsidy route. Even if you aren’t literally doing everything covered in this e-book yourself, such as design, it *is* your job to oversee all of these in the creation of your book. And of course, your book is your baby—so you’ll want to supervise its every step to ensure its proper development.

Ultimately, it’s important for you to learn as much as you can about the business of publishing. And it’s my goal with this book to *keep you* in the business of publishing—to make as few mistakes as possible at the start and to make as much money as possible in the end.

Introduction

As a former self-publishing consultant and coach, frequent speaker on the topic, and current president of a regional publishing association, I have seen almost every error authors can make (and have made many myself). Sadly, too many self-published authors end up with books in hand that are crippled with mistakes. And by “mistakes” I don’t just mean typos—I mean mistakes in printing, design, style, and more that scream, “This is a self-published book by an amateur!”

Why is this a big deal? Because self-publishing is struggling to overcome the stigma it’s had for decades, and a self-published book still has two strikes against it in the eyes of many influential people, especially the media. A self-published author cannot afford (literally) to make any mistake that tips the scales against the book succeeding. With *over a half-million books* being published annually on all levels, and millions of manuscripts seeking to be published, the competition is tremendous. All authors, especially self-published authors, must do everything they can to have their books taken seriously.

Unfortunately, I see many self-published authors making the same mistakes over and over. And in almost every case, it’s simply because they didn’t know—and didn’t know enough to ask what they didn’t know. As I mentioned, I have coached authors through the process of self-publishing. So, it was my job to help them navigate the swirling seas of publishing and avoid the mines that would blow their projects out of the water. But authors often came to me too late in the game—after they had spent thousands of dollars only to discover their book couldn’t sell. Right now, countless authors are in the same position but haven’t yet discovered this, and someone like me will have to deliver the bad news. Talk about a dream-killer. I don’t want this to happen to you.

So, I’ve compiled what I’ve seen to be the 53 most common mistakes that authors make in the self-publishing process. Certainly there are more than 53, and this book may someday include hundreds of mistakes, but these are the most critical—the ones I need to urgently impart to you and every aspiring self-published author out there.

I’m passionate about self-publishing. I’ve been doing it professionally since I was ten years old, when I wrote, designed, and published a neighborhood “newspaper” using a typewriter, pen, and ruler. (Granted, though, I didn’t make much money.) I feel fortunate, and we *are* fortunate, to live in a time when we can create and sell professional publications with ease, at a relatively low cost, compared to only a decade or so ago. There are people out there, old and young, from all walks of life, who have valuable information and stories to share. If you are reading this book, you are most likely one of them. Just the right words put together in the right sentence from the mind of a single author can have a life-changing effect on thousands or even millions of people. Those few choice words can even save a person’s life. And *you* could be that author—but not if those words stay in your mind.

I’m not saying all self-published books (or even traditionally published ones) are automatically or inherently important. Believe me, I’ve seen plenty of junk. But one person’s junk can be another’s treasure. It’s not my job or anyone’s job to censor the collective creativity and consciousness of humanity (as much as I’d like to sometimes). Nor should self-publishing be condemned because of the duds in its midst. We don’t trash the entire restaurant industry because of the mom-and-pop joint on the corner that makes the worst pizza you’ve ever tasted.

Just as that restaurant should be given every opportunity to come to life and make its offering to the world, good or bad, so should the ideas of authors everywhere. Then, once it’s in public consumption, its merits can be debated. This is one of the essential points of Chris Anderson’s best-selling book, *The Long Tail* (Hyperion, 2006, 2008). The democratization of production and distribution has vastly reduced the gatekeepers of content. Instead of having our ideas filtered by the traditional “experts” of publishing, our ideas are now presented to the world at large for acceptance or rejection. From any given book’s potential, it’s the ultimate free market. And the general public serves as a filter

in this mass profligation of material, helping us to sort out the wheat from the chaff through online reviews, ratings, and other peer-to-peer assessments like you see on Amazon.com.

Of course this means that, apart from any of the advice in this book, you need to make sure your writing is the best it can be. The two preceding paragraphs are not a free pass to write a crappy book (perhaps the number-one criticism of self-published books). Study and respect the craft of writing, and honor the efforts of the masters before you. Learn what you need to, through classes or critique groups, to continually improve your chops. Don't try to write above your level or for the purpose of your book. Robert Kyosaki (*Rich Dad, Poor Dad*) often notes this when he speaks on having been self-published: "I'm a best-selling author, not a best-writing author." And above all else, if writing is a true challenge for you, team up with an excellent editor who knows how to make your words shine. (See Mistake #33.)

It's my hope that this book will help give *your* book every chance to succeed, whatever your definition of success is. As I mentioned, a single idea or thought can bring joy, meaning, clarity, understanding, or hope to someone right when they need it most. Let's give your ideas fertile soil in which to grow.

Design & Production Mistakes

While you as an author naturally will think first of your writing, as a self-publisher you also must think equally of packaging—the cover design, interior design, and format of your book. Long before readers interact with your poetry or prose, they will be gauging the quality of your writing by the wrapping it is in. The quickest way your book can fail is in its design and production, even more than in its writing (since with a bad design many readers will never get to your writing).

Unfortunately, this is also where you can sink a huge amount of money. Of all the mistakes I've seen authors fall into, these in design and production are usually the costliest. So, wherever your book is in its development as you read this (hopefully not too far), pay particular attention to each and every one of the mistakes in this section—they can make or break your book.

1: Bad title

I've seen great titles and I've seen bad titles. I won't embarrass the self-publishers of the bad ones, but let's just say they're out there. Although I'm often critical of the major New York publishing houses, one thing they generally do well is titles and covers. When an author goes with a major publisher, you rarely have control over the title. This is a source of some frustration with authors, but truth be told, 99% of the time the publisher knows best. If they've published hundreds of books in a particular genre, they've probably figured out what works and what doesn't.

But you're looking to self-publish, so it's altogether different. You have (and probably want) complete control over the title of your book. The problem is, unless you have a good circle of critics around you to provide objective feedback, it's hard to see your own book's title with the right eyes.

Here's the deal: your book's title is the single most important component of its success. "What about the writing?" you ask. Well, I respond by mentioning a book entitled *Everything Men Know About Women* by Dr. Alan Francis (the pseudonym of Cindy Cashman). It's a humor/novelty book made up of entirely blank pages (get it?), and it's steadily sold hundreds of thousands of copies over the past 20 years. So, this is a perfect example of how the writing is less important than the title. (And keep in mind we're talking about sales here; certainly if you want to earn awards and accolades the writing had better be good, too.)

So, the title simply must be the best as it can be. The title of your book is the one thing left when there's nothing else. When there may be no space for a synopsis, when there may be no room for a cover image, your book's very existence will be reduced to its bare-naked title. So, it must be great.

There's no secret formula for a good book title. There are some guidelines, however. Typically, the title should be no more than five or six words. (Just the title; not the subtitle.) If it's a non-fiction book, a good combination is a short, catchy title with a more explanatory subtitle. Timeless non-fiction titles (or subtitles) include phrases such as "how to" or "secrets" that convey a clear benefit. Fiction titles should be evocative.

Enlist a group of advisors to give you feedback on candidates. Consider gathering responses by test-marketing your titles online. Tim Ferris did this for his best-seller *The 4-Hour Workweek*, using sponsored ads on Google that measured how many people clicked through, thus revealing the most popular title choice. So, regardless of how you do it, invest time in cultivating and choosing the best title—it's critical and, although changing it later on after printing isn't impossible, it can cause unnecessary grief.

2: Bad cover

You can't judge a book by its cover, says the adage. But unfortunately that's exactly what people do.

Next to your book's title, the cover is the most important aspect of your book with regard to its ability to sell. As with other mistakes in this book, a bad cover will instantly give away your book's self-published status. It will effectively eliminate any chance of your writing being taken seriously.

So, this is not something you should do yourself, unless you have significant experience in graphic design or have an exceptional eye for it. And don't underestimate this point. Instead, accept the fact that, other than printing, this is one part of your project you will have to spend money on.

The best way to find a designer is to ask around among your writing and publishing contacts. Someone will have had a positive experience, or know someone who has. If you find your own, just keep in mind that you are seeking a *book-cover designer*—don't assume any designer is a capable cover designer. There are certain aspects of book-cover design that are unique. (For example, see Mistake #5 on "by".)

You can save some money on your cover design by having examples of what you envision to show your designer. Find the closest you can in the bookstore, library, or online, whether it's one book or a combination of a few. (Unless your cover will need physical enhancements such as embossing or spot varnish that you want to show your designer, most will be fine with being sent cover images from an online bookseller.) Your goal is to point your designer in the right direction; otherwise, you'll be paying for concepting time for her to start from a blank page.

Lastly, don't put a photo of yourself on the cover unless you are well-known, the book is about you, or you're using it to brand and promote a personal business of yours, e.g., real estate agent, coach, therapist, or financial advisor. And if you do this, please, please, please use a professionally taken photo; the cover is too important to use anything else.

3: Going font crazy

This won't be a concern if you use an experienced book designer. However, if you choose to typeset your book yourself, pay attention.

A clear indication of a self-published book (in the negative sense) is poor typography. Even the average reader will notice this, especially if it's bad enough. But knowledgeable people in the publishing industry—agents, media, distributors—will notice even a slight variance from what is standard.

Unless you have some training or understanding of typography, the best thing to do is stick to a simple recipe of three type choices.

One will be for your body text (the main text of your pages). This choice should be in a serif type for a printed book (good readability on paper) or a sans-serif type for an e-book (as is the type in this paragraph). Some good serif examples are Palatino, Garamond, and Century, while good sans-serif typefaces for body text include Lucida and Verdana. Avoid Times or Times New Roman, as they are overused and (being the default setting in Microsoft Word) are typically the choice of a complete amateur. Lastly, your type size should be 10–12 points for optimum readability, although in an e-book you may want to go slightly larger for readability onscreen. (This is 14-point type.)

Your second type choice will be for chapter titles, subtitles, headings, or subheads within text, and essentially any larger or bold type uses. A good design rule of thumb is to use a sans serif choice for these to contrast your use of a serif typeface in the body text (or vice versa in an e-book). Whereas your serif choice for body text is functional, this choice is the one that will provide a sense of character and style to your book—for example, humorous, serious, playful, casual, formal, etc. Look at your choice and see what it "says" to you. Pick a size appropriate for the situation and be consistent.

Lastly, you'll pick an accent type. This is used primarily for the headers and footers at the tops and bottoms of the pages (which includes page numbers), but also any peripheral text (such as photo captions and footnotes). Again, be consistent in your sizes (these are usually smaller than body text) and usage.

Obviously, it's not my intent to cover the totality of typography in these few paragraphs, nor is it necessary when there are many good books out there on the topic. If you decide to typeset your own book, you'd be wise to buy at least one of these books.

And even if you buy a book or two, it'd still be a smart investment to seek an opinion from a book designer. Most likely, you'd set your own type to save money—having a designer review your type choices and typesetting will be far less expensive than having them do the actual work, but will give you the guidance to make it look professional.

4: Not having enough white space on the page

A common amateur book-design mistake is to nearly fill up the page. Narrow margins are not only a sign of a novice at work, they also create an uninviting look for the reader. For a standard trade paperback (5.5 by 8.5 or 6 by 9 inches), it's best to have a margin of at least three-quarters of an inch to a full inch top and bottom, and at least a half-inch on the outside. (See Mistake #9 for information on margins.)

Additional white space is achieved through more open line spacing (leading)—what would be about 1.5 line spacing in Microsoft Word, for example. For an e-book that will be read on a computer screen (as opposed to a dedicated reading device such as the Kindle), the leading should be even more generous; this e-book uses 28-point leading. Indented paragraphs or slight extra spacing between paragraphs also help. Just keep in mind that paragraph indents in current design are only about the equivalent of three to four character spaces, not the half-inch default for the first tab in word processing.

The bottom line is that white space is relief for the eyes on the page. It's visual breathing room. Don't fall in the "penny wise, pound foolish" mindset of putting too much on the page simply to save printing costs.

5: Putting "By" in front of your name

If I'm playing a little game of "How fast can I tell this book is self-published?" in my head, this is the first thing I look for. I'm referring to your name on the front cover and inside title page. (It's perfectly fine on the copyright page.)

I don't know why this is the case, but it just is. By-lines ("By Jane Smith") are used in newspapers and magazines, but not books. Tour a bookstore or library and you'll see what I mean.

So, without even looking inside your book, a critical professional will instantly know your book's status if you make this mistake.

6: Not having an ISBN or bar code

Your book's ISBN (International Standard Book Number) is the equivalent of your Social Security number. It's unique to your book and has some meaningful aspects to it. And as with your Social Security number, it's pretty hard to get far without it.

Other than selling your book at personal events, such as seminars and parties, you'll have a hard time selling your book most anywhere without it. Essentially, it serves as the tracking mechanism for

inventories and ordering.

Unfortunately, they're only available individually (\$125) and in blocks of ten (\$245), 100, or 1,000. Many new self-publishers express frustration about this, since a block of ten, which seems excessive, is only twice the cost of one ISBN. But look at it this way—if you know you'll only be publishing one book, at least you don't have to buy ten ISBNs (as it used to be), and if you think you'll publish more books, you get ten ISBNs for the price of two. The bottom line is, compared to many other businesses, the cost of entry in publishing is fairly low. Or to put it harshly, if \$125 is causing you grief, you may want to think about saving up some more money before you continue.

Regardless of how many you decide to buy, you get your numbers at www.Bowker.com, the official ISBN agency in the United States. (Bowker can also direct you to the agency for your country if you're not publishing in the United States.) The website will also give you all the details on how ISBNs are to be used.

One note of caution: There are companies out there that will sell you a single ISBN for less than Bowker's price (usually around \$50). This sounds very tempting, but remember that Bowker is the official agency—no other company is. This means when you buy from another company you may be getting a second-hand ISBN. While second-hand may be fine for purchasing a car or TV, an ISBN is assigned to a specific publishing company (and can't be reassigned), which means the publisher of record for the ISBN you buy will be attached to your book. This will inevitably cause confusion down the road and isn't worth whatever money you save.

In addition to your ISBN, your book will usually need a bar code on the cover. This code (which you can see on the bottom of the back cover of any properly created book) is an additional inventory mechanism used by most members of the book industry. (It is not the same as a UPC [Universal Product Code], which is used by other retail industries. If you intend to sell your book through certain retail businesses, you may need this as well.)

Your cover designer can create this bar code for you. If you're designing the cover yourself, your printer should be able to provide or drop in the bar code. Just make sure to leave space for it. And no matter what your book cover may look like, the bar code needs to be in its own block of white space with sufficient space around the code for it to be properly scanned.

Lastly, the bar code is generated from the ISBN, so you need to obtain that first.

7: Not having a title on the spine

This almost sounds silly, like something you couldn't possibly overlook. But I see it enough that it bears mentioning.

So, (a) your book's spine should contain your book's title and (b), the text should be oriented such that it is right-side up when the book is flat on its back cover. Backwards spines are yet another sign of an amateur production. The spine does not need to include your book's subtitle, although it can if there's room, but it should include your full name (or optionally your last name).

Of course with design software as it is nowadays, you can always orient the text so that it reads down the spine, as self-publishing guru Dan Poynter recommends (and does). This way, prospective buyers can read it on a shelf much quicker, without having to tilt their heads.

Which brings me to my next point: make sure your spine title is easy to read from a distance. Of course this will depend on the width of the spine—but make the text as large as possible, and with good color contrast, to make it more noticeable. What you want to follow is “the ten-foot rule,” which is a reminder that your title should be easily readable from ten feet away.

Lastly, it's worth noting that some subsidy publishers, such as CreateSpace, will not print a title on the spine if your book is too slim (usually a page count below 110–130). Because the print-on-demand process these companies use is significantly variable, cover printing can be off by up to a

quarter inch. With a slim spine, this could cause the spine title to appear on the front or back cover, so they simply don't allow this possibility (worse than having no title on the spine). This is one of the drawbacks of subsidy publishers, but isn't a deal-killer in some circumstances. For example, I have a client with a 108-page humor book sold on Amazon through CreateSpace. Since prospective purchasers on Amazon don't see the spine (as they would in a brick-and-mortar bookstore), it isn't an issue. The dozens of books my client sells each month—without the hassles of inventory and shipping, with the benefit of a direct deposit from CreateSpace each month—is a perfectly fine trade-off for him. Likewise, a book sold (or given away) in person by a business professional, such as speaker or consultant, may be acceptable without a title on the spine. When possible, however, be sure to properly typeset your book's spine.

8: Misspelling “foreword”

It's one of the small but significant mistakes in this book. And of course, the more literary or academic your book is, the more ironic this mistake would be. It's the publishing equivalent of having your butt crack show when you bend over at a party—no one will likely tell you it's happening, but it'll be noticed.

The mnemonic I teach to remember this mistake is, “foreword” is short for “*before* any other *words* in this book” or “before words.”

9: Not including extra space for your gutters

For a book to open and not have the text block be too close to the fold, it's necessary to have the gutter (the inside margin) of the page be wider than the outside (page-edge) margins.

This trips up self-publishers who lay out their book in a design program (or worse, in Word) but have never been through the production process. You wouldn't think to do this intuitively.

If you're using a professional designer to lay out and typeset your book, this shouldn't be an issue—but make sure to double-check it before your book goes to print. Your printer rep may not be looking for this.

10: Setting up all pages as right-side pages

As with the previous mistake, this one happens to self-publishers laying out their books without having production experience. It usually happens when they're using Microsoft Word and have only set up the document as single-sided pages (the default in Word and other word-processors). In that instance, you'll typically have your page numbers in the top or bottom right-hand corners, and the left margin will be larger. However, when you're designing in spreads (facing pages) as with a book, you need to alternate placements and margins. Even when the headers or footers and page numbers are centered, they're not *exactly* centered; they're slightly off to allow for the wider gutter margin on the inside of the page. (See previous mistake.)

So, when laying out a book, make sure you set your program for facing pages and pay attention to positioning and margins. Remember to include the blank pages where needed, and remember that chapters, sections, and major portions of the book (such as the preface) traditionally start on the right-side page.

11: Having an inconsistent layout

One key mistake I've seen in self-published books is page elements that are not consistent throughout. Page elements are things like margins, pagination (page numbering), leading (line spacing), the size of headings, and so on. I remember one book I saw a couple of years ago in which the page numbers were in the upper outside corners, but about a dozen pages had numbering in the bottom center. I know, as a designer, these things can happen for a variety of reasons—but they should never end up in print.

Make sure when you're going through the proofing process to include a step to proof the design elements. A typical proofreader may not be good at this (though some are), so you may need to hire an experienced book designer to do this for you. While I don't advise doing this yourself, if you insist, don't do it while proofreading your text. Do one, then the other. Also, you'll catch more design-element problems if you print your book's pages and look at them from a distance—like a few feet away. This way, your eyes are not focused on reading the text.

12: Hiring a designer without book-design experience

Designing a book is not the same as designing a brochure or website. The rules and elements of each of these formats are different. Although a designer (of whatever kind) may be competent at book design, don't make this assumption. Ask any prospective designers for samples from their portfolios, and make sure they include both book covers and interiors. In some cases, book designers have more experience in certain genres, such as romance, sci-fi, business non-fiction, etc. Take this into consideration if your designer has a genre-specific background; she or he may create beautiful fantasy books but may not do well designing a self-help book.

If you find yourself going with a designer who's never done a book (perhaps for financial reasons, like hiring a student), at least hire an experienced book designer to review and critique the results before they go to print. Many designers will offer their knowledge as a consultant on an hourly basis.

13: Not putting your manuscript in the best format for its purpose and audience

Do you think college students would likely read a 700-page book for personal reasons? This was the case with *No More Ramen: The 20-Something's Real World Survival Guide* by Nicholas Aretakis. When it was brought to a friend and colleague of mine, book coach Karla Olson of BookStudio, the page count rivaled that of some of the *Harry Potter* books. She rightfully advised and helped Aretakis to cut the count down as far as possible. (The original title was also a misfit, something about “life stages,” which would've been far less appealing to college students, to say the least.) As a result, *No More Ramen* has gone on to become a respectable-selling book. While page count is not technically format, it is one of the considerations you need to have when writing and creating your book.

Format is *what* it is—a printed book, e-book, audio book, video, booklet, manual, workbook, software, interactive program, web site, or any combination of these. To be a bit silly, if you wrote *Drivetime Yoga* (a book by Elaine Masters that provides yoga exercises you can do while driving), would it make more sense to produce it as an audio book or video? Likewise, if you wrote a manuscript helping teens deal with peer pressure, which do you think would be better—a printed book

or video? (Video; teens watch more than they read.) And would it be better purchased as a DVD or download from Amazon? (Download; teens are accustomed to instant purchases and watching videos online.) So, as you see, the format is a choice directly related to the purpose and “reader” of your book. A poor choice here can mean poor sales, so it’s important nowadays to not get stuck in the mindset of a printed book.

That said, this doesn’t mean you are limited to one format. While you will want to start with a primary format that’s best for your situation, add other formats as your budget and time allow. Some teens do read books; some senior citizens do watch downloaded videos. What this relates to is the “repurposing” of your content, which is the topic of the mistake on page 68.

Printing Mistakes

Printing technology, and the possibilities that come with it, have changed dramatically in the past several years. It's no wonder authors and self-publishers are confused about their options. Add to that the often-mysterious lingo of printing (2-up, C1S, offset, direct to plate, etc.) and it's a recipe for disaster.

When you turn your book's layout and design files over to your printer, you put a big amount of trust and money into their hands. The question is, will this trust translate into a great job? Part of that outcome is a mix of research and education on your part, starting with the mistakes in this section.

14: Printing too many copies of your book

The excitement of the birth of your book can be quite intoxicating. Many people have told you that your manuscript or galley copy is amazing and incredible. (You've overlooked that many of these people are well-meaning family and friends.) Your gut tells you this will be a real hit; you envision yourself on Oprah; and you envision long lines of eager readers waiting for you to autograph your book at a signing.

Stop the presses! Literally. I hope at the point you're reading this you haven't already committed to the printing of your book (or you've already learned what I'm about to say). Simply put, don't let the excitement of your new book translate into an unnecessarily large print run. At one time, not too many years ago, it was necessary to print around 3,000 copies of a book to get a reasonable per-book cost. But those days are gone and word hasn't gotten out to many authors. With the advent of digital printing, it's possible to get a *single copy* produced at a cost you can make a profit on. And even with traditional offset printing, a print run of only 1,000 copies may yield a decent per-book cost.

My experience in dealing with authors is that they have a hard time accounting for how they'll sell 300 books, much less 3,000. Once they get past the couple or few dozen friends and family they'll probably (hopefully) make easy sales to, they quickly realize they're at a loss for how they'll sell the rest. They have this vague notion that they'll make lots of sales to bookstores or on the Internet, but no real plan for how that will happen.

With a short print run or going POD (print on demand), you avoid the potential of boxes of unsold books sitting around. You can also quickly get a second printing out that corrects the mistakes you find after your first printing has come off the press. And you can always use first printing revenues for a larger second run.

15: Confusing print-on-demand (POD), vanity publishing, and self-publishing

Novice self-publishers entering this realm are often misled by unscrupulous publishing services as to the nature of the publishing agreement. Specifically, vanity publishers will portray themselves as print-on-demand operations, self-publishing companies, or publishing service providers when in fact they merely operate as the modern equivalent of the vanity publisher of 30 years ago. They charge an enormous sum of money to (often poorly) produce a mass quantity of books (typically a minimum of 3,000) that you are stuck with.

Likewise, some subsidy publishers will retain a significant amount of control over a project, ultimately leading to the self-publisher not being a true self-publisher.

As I mentioned in the preface, you are a self-publisher if you retain complete control of the publishing process and the ISBN for your book. If a company tells you they can rent to you, or allow you

to use, an ISBN they've purchased, be wary of them. They can certainly allow you to use the ISBN, but on the record for that ISBN (which bookstores and others use to order books) it will show them as the publisher of record, not you.

See Mistake #6 for more on ISBNs.

16: Printing your book on thin paper

Although it's nearly safe to say if you go to a true traditional book printer you won't have to worry about this, you'll want to make sure this issue is addressed in discussions with any printer. At the very least, confirm what paper stock will be used.

Simply put, some printers will use thin paper as a way of cutting costs. They may be trying to increase their profits, they may be trying to meet your cost requirements, or they may be trying to beat a competitor's prices. Whatever the case, you can't let this be. Even if this is making your project financially feasible, it's one corner you can't afford to cut.

Thin paper will convey cheapness, a lack of professionalism, and certainly a lack of quality. The feel of the paper may simply turn off your reader; or worst-case scenario, the paper is thin enough to see the print through the other side.

Like most other things in this book, even if your readers don't care (unlikely), this matter will most definitely eliminate any chance of your book being taken seriously by the media, reviewers, agents, and other publishing professionals.

Lastly, a lesser consideration nonetheless worth mentioning is that thin paper will reduce the overall thickness of your book. Readers will often subconsciously, or even consciously, equate the heft of the book with its value. So, you certainly don't want your book to be any thinner than necessary. And of course, this also means if you have an inherently thin book and need to beef it up a bit, you'll want to consider going with a thicker (but not too thick) paper stock.

17: Using a cover paper stock that is likely to curl

As with thin paper, this is a mark of bad quality. Although it's not completely possible to prevent cover curling in all conditions, it certainly shouldn't happen in normal conditions. Excessive moisture and humidity being absorbed into the cover, combined with certain paper stock and coating, is what causes the curling. And once this happens, it's very hard for the book to go back to the way it was. You need your printer to advise you on this and provide some sort of guarantee.

18: Your book being glossy coated on both sides of the cover

This is one of those "it just isn't done" things. While there isn't anything inherently wrong about having your cover glossy on both sides, meaning both the outside and inside, it's the mark of a non-professional production. (Covers gloss-coated on both sides will, however, be more prone to curling, especially as the humidity changes.)

Take a look at the professionally produced books on your shelf or in the library or store. You'll see they're gloss-coated on the outside of the cover for appearance and protection, but not on the inside.

So, why would a printer do this? Almost certainly, they aren't a true book printer (and therefore aren't aware of this standard) and possibly are trying to compensate for a cheap, thin cover paper

stock. To avoid this, you need to specify the cover be “coated one-side,” also referred to as “C1S.” Although you shouldn’t run into this problem when using a book printer (see Mistake #22), it’s always best to be specific to ensure everyone is clear as to expectations.

19: Going digital when you should go offset and vice versa

The question comes down to how many copies you want to have on hand. If you are going to actively promote your book, are operating as a business and not a hobby, and have a plan for how you will achieve your goals, then it’s often recommended that you print the number you anticipate to sell in a year.

But that’s the tricky part. Going back to “Don’t print too many copies” (Mistake #14), authors too often have unrealistic expectations for sales. So, make sure this number is based on market research and a realistic assessment of your available time and money to promote.

Once you feel you’re realistic about a goal for one year’s sales, then it comes down to what that number is. If you are going to print fewer than 500 copies, you should print digitally. More than 1,000 copies and you should print traditionally using an offset press. Between, those two numbers is a dead area—meaning the economies of scale are such that printing digitally is not worthwhile for your per-book cost, nor is it for traditional printing. So, if you feel you’ll sell a number in the first year in that range, err on the side of being conservative and print 500. If you meet your goal and sell out in less than a year, you can always use the revenue to print a larger run the next time around.

20: Not getting several price quotes

When you’re ready to bid out your book project, make sure to get at least three price quotes. Many printers now offer this part of the process online, so you just need to go to their website and fill out a form.

Whatever the case, this is one step you must take to avoid potentially spending hundreds of dollars more than necessary. Shopping around is critical, and I suggest at least three quotes to ensure a better price. All printers are not created equal—depending on your project, one printer’s experience and equipment may make them a far better choice than another. And this often translates into money, meaning printers who aren’t properly geared for your specific project’s needs will often cost you more. (It may be a matter of efficiency, or it may be that they have to outsource parts of the job they can’t internally handle.)

Furthermore, printers’ costs can vary from week to week or month to month. If one’s business is slow, they may be willing to cut their prices. Or you can find cost variances between printers due to paper costs from different suppliers. This is why any given printer will usually have a limit on how long their quotes are valid, such as 30 or 60 days.

21: Not getting price quotes from all over the United States, and potentially the world

Self-publishers often mistakenly think their service providers (designers, editors, printers) need to be local. Certainly, it’s nice to have that proximity; and perhaps for your own personality this is important (because you want face-to-face meetings, for example). However, at least be aware that you are

potentially paying a higher price for this preference.

One significant factor in printing costs is real estate costs; a printer in rural Ohio has an advantage over one in a major city, whether they own or rent their property.

Also, as I mentioned in the last mistake, a printer in one area may be less busy than another in a different area—and that need for work can mean a lower cost to you. If you don't seek quotes outside your own geographic area, you may miss this opportunity.

But what about the cost of shipping? Yes, absolutely, this needs to be taken into account. However, the rural printer's low cost of facilities (and thus lower print cost) may outweigh the extra cost of shipping, making the total cost lower.

You can then take this one step further and explore printing overseas. This is particularly true of color printing, which is often done in Hong Kong. Should you choose this route (and aren't concerned with "exporting jobs"), then I strongly advise you to contact and compare print brokers familiar with international work. Their ability to negotiate terms, identify a reputable printer, and navigate the issues of customs will be well worth any additional cost. In the end, you may get your job printed at a price you couldn't obtain in the United States or be able to print a higher-quality book within your same budget.

22: Thinking all printers are, or can be, book printers

One of the biggest mistakes made in self-publishing is thinking that any printer is capable of printing a book. I've heard the story too many times. A well-intentioned self-publisher goes to Kinko's or Staples to print their book and walks away with a poor-quality product or an overpriced product or both. A printer is not necessarily a book printer. You don't go to Kinko's or Staples to have your book printed any more than you'd go to an offset press to have a few copies of a flyer made.

What a true book printer offers is the equipment and expertise that are unique to book production. The process is one of printing, trimming, binding, and packing. A non-book printer will typically lack one or more of these aspects when it comes to knowledge or equipment. At best, they'll outsource the missing step and then charge you extra for that; at worst, they'll botch up that part altogether.

So, whether you pay an extra cost or pay by having an unsellable book, you pay. A well-meaning printer will attempt to fix the job, but of course may only be able to do so much. A malicious printer will say they've met the terms of the contract—you've got your book and they did nothing wrong.

To give you an idea of how exclusive this arena is, there are only about 50 book printers in the entire United States. Essentially, it all comes down to equipment and experience. Book printers have the totality of both to deliver your book at the optimum combination of quality and price. Going with a non-book printer, you will usually sacrifice either quality or price.

Quality may suffer in a variety of areas. I've seen all of the following: an uneven or curved spine; inconsistent printing and color from book to book; misalignment of pages; misalignment of the cover (such as the title not being centered on the spine); cheap paper stock; sloppy glue on the binding; a binding that easily breaks or comes loose; uneven trimming of pages; and more. And then there are the true horror stories of missing pages, pages out of order, upside-down covers, and the like.

Pricing is usually a simpler problem: you just pay too much. When a printer is not equipped to handle books, it usually means they're missing some component of the process, such as a bindery. This results in their having to send the pages they've printed and trimmed to be bound at another facility, which causes the cost of your production to go up. Or the price could be higher purely because the printer's system is not efficient for book production, leading to higher labor costs.

This is not to say the non-book printer will automatically quote you a higher price. But be aware that if their price is competitive or even low, there's a good chance the quality is going to be lost in some way.

Self-publishing expert Dan Poynter provides an excellent, up-to-date listing of book printers on his web site at www.ParaPublishing.com.

You can also get quick print quotes for a wide variety of book types at Ron Pramshauer's www.SelfPublishing.com.

One last note about Kinko's and Staples (and similar places): they can be great resources when you simply need a few copies of a book in a hurry or to produce galleys. You won't incur set-up fees (as with most POD printers) and you'll quickly get as few as you want to print. Just don't mistake them for a book printer when you need to do your full print run.

23: Not having a model to show the printer

Book model, that is. (If you've got Heidi Klum at home, set her free. And I'm calling the authorities.) Simply find an example of a book you like—in terms of size, paper stock, binding, cover, and anything else—that represents how you'd like your book to be.

Although you should have no reason to show a model to a reputable book printer (see the last mistake), I still recommend this because it's further insurance you're both on the same page.

Often times, the terms and lingo in the printing business can be confusing to the layperson. Certainly, it's a good idea to learn them, both for your project and your knowledge as a professional self-publisher. But there's also nothing like showing your printer an example to ensure there's no doubt whatsoever as to exactly what you want.

24: Not carefully reviewing the proof of your book

Your printer should provide you with a proof copy of your book before the final printing process (if not, find another printer). If you're using a traditional offset printer, this will typically be in the form of a color "flat" for the cover wrap (meaning an untrimmed flat print of the front and back covers and spine, all in one piece), as well as "bluelines" for the interior pages.

If you are using a digital press, your proof will usually come to you in the form of the finished book—completely trimmed and bound. This is yet another nice thing about digital printing; the process allows for them to do this with little extra work, and it helps ensure total client satisfaction.

The purpose of the proof is for you to check *every* aspect of the printing to make sure it's what you intended. Is everything where it should be, in proper order, in the right color, of proper quality, and so on? For a digitally printed book, is the binding and overall book what you asked for?

One thing a proof is *not* for is fixing text. It should not have gotten to this point until after the text has been thoroughly proofread. While you certainly can request or submit text changes at this point, they may be very costly with an offset printer. What would seem to you like a simple change of a single letter on a page will require them to create a new "plate" for that page's signature (the many pages that are printed simultaneously), and this can equate to hundreds of dollars. Digital printing, fortunately, is less of a problem—you would likely just request an additional proof at a nominal fee. So, especially with offset printing, it's a best practice to keep any text changes at this stage to absolutely critical ones (such as an important fact or reference point).

25: Getting a comb or spiral binding

With the exception of certain types of books—seminar workbooks, manuals, music books, map books, journals, and cookbooks, to name a few—books are not published with comb or spiral bindings. Those books are intended to lay flat while the reader’s hands are occupied.

If you break this rule or don’t follow this standard, your book will either appear unprofessional or not be chosen by booksellers who want spines that can be read on the shelf (because their readers do).

Promotional Mistakes

Promotion is arguably the hardest thing for authors to get their arms around. As difficult as writing is or can be, it's nothing compared to what most authors experience when it comes to spreading the word about their books. Most likely this is because the author was drawn to writing first, while promotion is a necessary evil—as opposed to a professional marketer who falls into being an author second.

For too many authors, promotion is an afterthought, and one that comes after they assumed their books would just sell themselves. As with printing technology, the technology of promotion is changing phenomenally. While the fundamentals of getting the word out are essentially the same, how we go about doing it is where the changes are occurring. And in many ways, this is where the mistakes are, as we'll see in this section.

26: Not doing something every day to promote

Promotion is like the old Chinese water-torture concept—it's more effective in many little constant drips than random large efforts. A few years ago, I had the pleasure of meeting and talking with Jack Canfield, whom you may know of as the co-creator of the immensely-successful book series *Chicken Soup for the Soul*. Among other things, I asked him what he felt most contributed to its phenomenon. He said they (he and co-creator Mark Victor Hansen) did five promotional things each and every day. They didn't have to be big things—a simple email, a phone call, Internet research, etc.—but they did them day in and day out. Think about it. If you kept that up for a year, you'd have done nearly 2,000 promotional activities.

So, like the advice that we should eat five fruits and vegetables a day, heed the advice that your book will have a healthier life if you do five promotional activities each day.

27: Not being newsworthy

While it's not quite accurate to say your book will live or die based on its media coverage, it's nearly inescapable that media coverage will be the difference between your book merely doing “okay” in sales and selling well. (The one exception would be if you have a significant following of your own already, as an expert, celebrity, or leader of some kind. Then, you may have enough of a platform to generate successful sales without media help.)

The problem when it comes to media coverage for most authors is understanding why it happens. It's not because your book is newsworthy in and of itself; it's the rare book that's a conversational topic on its own. Typically, it's the book's tie-in to some other topic that is newsworthy. For example, a number of books were on the market in the summer of 2001 related to Iraq, Osama bin Laden, and terrorism, and many were not even on the radar of media outlets. But the morning of September 11 that year shifted everything; suddenly, if you had written a book on one of these topics, your phone was ringing off the hook and book sales jumped.

The same thing happened with Sarah Palin. In the summer of 2008 there was exactly one book about Palin on the market. Unexpectedly, John McCain announced that she would be his vice-presidential running mate. Assuming you were awake between August and November of 2008, I don't need to tell you how topical Palin became; she was loved or hated, but not ignored. Suddenly, Epicenter Press found themselves with a “happy problem”—they couldn't keep up with the demand for their book, getting massive orders from all corners of the business.

Both of these examples show that things can change in a flash, but can't be prepared for. What is it you *can* control to make your book newsworthy? As I mentioned on the previous page, your book needs to be tied to what's topical at the moment. Obviously, this can change. In good economic times, a book about starting your own business might be promoted along the lines of get-rich stories or entrepreneurs enjoying the good life; in bad economic times, as has been recently, such books will earn coverage based on topics like exploring your options if you lose your job or government assistance for small-business start-ups (though get-rich stories might still resonate).

To know what's topical, keep your finger on the pulse of the media. And it's important to tune in to media outside your normal realm. If you have liberal political leanings, don't ignore the Fox News Channel and conservative radio shows; if you call yourself a conservative, crack open the *New York Times* or turn on the Rachel Maddow Show. Or to put it less politically, if you're a Wall Street type, pick up a copy of *InStyle* magazine, and conversely, if you know who the paparazzi are most following at any given moment, try reading *The Economist* for a change. Gene Simmons, co-founder of the rock supergroup KISS and business genius (see my book *Rock to Riches: Build Your Business the Rock & Roll Way*), credits much of his marketing and promotional savvy to reading a wide range of publications. He says he frequently makes connections in doing so that he would have never thought of otherwise.

While many of us (at least over the age of 35) still think primarily of the traditional major media outlets and formats, it's important to branch out to social media as well. In fact, with most book promotions, it's more important to focus on these media instead. While the majors can help your book hit a home run like no other (think Oprah), many successes are being built by working the bloggers and other "peer-to-peer" opinion leaders. I mentioned Chris Anderson's book *The Long Tail* in the introduction, and this is one of its primary concepts—media is becoming less "top down" and more lateral.

The phrase I like to use, which I've taught many authors in seminars and otherwise, is "Promote your topic, not your title." Whatever media appearances you seek and garner, from a mention in a blog post to a full interview on a TV talk show, focus on discussing the topic and leave the mentioning of your book to the host.

And one last note on this—don't ignore it just because your book is fiction. All fiction has real-world topical relevance. Even the most extraordinary science fiction or fantasy is built on human conflict, emotions, and tribulations. The antagonism between a Gargian and a Netholite may be taking place on the outermost planet of a solar system in the constellation Orion, but it can still speak to race relations on Earth. And certainly any earthbound fiction is rooted in good old human relations, group dynamics, history, philosophy, and more—all of which can be related, at least more or less, to what's topical. Just make sure you connect the dots for the media in your pitches and for the audience in your media appearances.

28: Waiting until your book is published to start promoting

Start promoting the minute you're *committed* to the success of your book. And I think that scary word there in italics is what keeps many authors from doing this. *What if I change my mind? What if I'm not finished with the book for a year? What if people don't like it? What if...?* Yes, what if? But that's true for life. There are no guarantees things will go as we plan. Rock star Jon Bon Jovi once said, "Put your goals in pen, but put your plans in pencil." (I also like the saying "If you want to make God laugh, be attached to your plans.") So think about it this way: if promoting your book reveals a flaw (people aren't interested in it) or hidden truth (your lack of sincere interest), then isn't it better to know this *before* you've spent hours and potentially thousands of dollars on it? Speaker and author Jack McClen-

don (*The Time Genie*) has an interesting observation—why do we think the word *disillusion* is bad? Wouldn't we *want* to be rid of illusions?

So, with all that in mind, here are just a few of the things you can start doing right away to promote your coming book:

Start your website or blog—Get one going, offer samples of your book, get feedback, and build an email list of potential customers. It used to be expensive and difficult to create a website, but now it's easier than ever. And you can even avoid that altogether by starting a blog. Many authors are going this route since a blog can now do much of what a website does—more easily and for free. The most popular blog platforms are Blogger.com, Typepad.com, and WordPress.com, though there are many more out there.

Write articles—If your book is non-fiction, write articles on the topic and start getting those spread around the Internet. Seek out like-minded websites, newsletters, and e-zines as potential outlets. Also, sign up with www.EzineArticles.com as an easy (and free) way to post and disseminate your articles. If your book is fiction, write articles on non-fiction topics related to your book's themes. One novelist whose books are based in New Orleans writes travel articles about the city, occasionally featuring locations in his books.

Get endorsements—These can take a long time to get, so patience and persistence are the order of the day. The endorsement of a top-level expert or celebrity may take a year. Likewise in landing someone to write a foreword for your book. So, don't let this wait. And of course, it's better to get going so these can appear in your first printing instead of having to wait until your next printing. (And they can be used in your promotions, not to mention seeking more endorsements.)

Test your market—While you're working on your manuscript, test it out on potential readers and buyers. I know an author who's working on a book of humorous vignettes about dating, and he's testing his material rigorously. (He has an engineering background, so what would you expect?) He passes them around writers groups and via email to friends, and he's even tried out his bits by doing stand-up routines at open-mic events. Aside from getting feedback, when you do this you're building a set of (hopefully) interested future customers.

Dive into social media—These are the sites such as YouTube, Facebook, MySpace, LinkedIn, Twitter, and more that you've heard about. There are entire books written on using these to make connections, so learn what you can and start using one or more of these media. As cliché as it sounds, they really are the future of promotions. In fact, just this morning, I read an article in *The Washington Post* about novice author Kelly Corrigan's YouTube success story. She was getting almost no marketing help from the publisher of her memoir *The Middle Place*, so she posted a video on YouTube of one of her book events. In the year since, that video has been viewed 4.5 million times, her book has sold over 300,000 copies, and it was on the *New York Times* bestseller list for 20 weeks, peaking at #2. Of course, there are many YouTube videos that lead to nothing of this sort, but you won't know until you try.

29: Not knowing your target market or not even having one

If I told you to shoot an arrow and hit the target, but didn't tell you what the target was, how could you succeed? Same goes with book promotion and marketing. The easy (and all-too-common) answer to "Who's your intended reader?" is "Well, everyone would like my book." This is dangerous and naive thinking. In the highly unlikely event your book had potential appeal to everyone, it's too hard to successfully market to everyone. Marketing messages are most effective when they're targeted—like you're speaking directly to each individual recipient. Note the famous line from a past McDonald's

promotion was “You deserve a break today”—not “Everyone deserves a break today” or “You all deserve a break today.” So, pick as focused a market as you can for your topic (such as acupuncturists in Florida versus acupuncturists in general) and start there. Don’t worry about losing buyers; they’ll always be there later if and when you expand.

Once you’ve chosen your target market, get to know everything you can about its members. Ideally, you’re a member of that market (write what you know about), but that’s not always the case. Either way, you need to read the publications they read, attend the events they attend, follow the blogs they follow, frequent the websites they frequent, and most importantly, know what would motivate them to buy what you have. You need to *understand* and *know* them. You need to be where they are (either in the real world or online) and put your book where they will discover it. This might be physically, meaning the book itself, or virtually, meaning mention of the book somewhere.

30: Doing book signings instead of book events

Which would interest you more—a famous chef just sitting at a table in a bookstore signing her latest book, or the same chef giving a cooking demonstration before signing books? People would rather attend a book *event* than just a book signing. And people are far more likely to buy your book at a book event than just a signing.

Here’s the reality of a signing. Unless you’re a famous author, when people see you just sitting behind a table at a store, they’re probably going to take the long way where they’re going to avoid you. No sales there. For those who are brave or curious enough to venture to your table, check out your book, and talk to you, unless you have a very engaging or charming personality, it’s not likely they’ll buy your book. Why? Because they aren’t *invested*. A book event is more involved, more dynamic, and helps get attendees hooked. And it attracts more passers by.

For a successful event, think outside the box. If you’ve written a novel, don’t just sit on a stool and read it; enlist drama students from a local college to act out one of your most riveting scenes. If you’ve written a non-fiction book, think of the most visual and showy way you can demonstrate your material. Wow the people attending and you’ll sell more books, generate more word of mouth, and get booked for more events.

For all the reasons mentioned so far, bookstores would rather you do an event as well. In fact, many won’t be interested unless you do. So, it’s best to have at least the concept of your event in mind before you approach the store; you’ll need to “sell” them on what you’re doing.

A couple more tips about book events:

Try to schedule them toward the end of the month. Most bookstores have some sort of event calendar, either physical or online—the later in the month your event is, the more time people have to learn about it.

Place copies of your book on each chair set up for the event before anyone arrives. The attendees will have to pick up the book to sit, it gives them something to look at before you start, and once people have opened your book they are much more likely to buy it.

Lastly, related to what I wrote about YouTube in Mistake #28, get a friend or colleague to videotape your events and post the videos on YouTube. It’ll cost you nearly nothing and open up your event to a whole new audience.

31: Ignoring non-traditional markets and non-bookstore sales

Did you know most books are *not* sold in bookstores? You probably didn't. It's the first place aspiring and new authors think of (and want their book to be on the shelf), but it's not necessarily the best place for your book. Consider this: if you wrote a book on dog discipline, where would it likely sell better, at a bookstore or a pet store? Or how about a doggy daycare facility? As I mentioned in Mistake #29, put your book where your target market will discover it. Not every dog owner goes into a Borders, but they all go into some pet product store.

On top of this, tons of books are sold outside of stores. The term "non-traditional sales" (of books) mostly means those occurring outside of retail, such as through corporations, non-profits organizations, government, associations, and the like. These are huge targets because they purchase in bulk, and they're ideal because the sales are non-returnable (unlike to bookstores). Often these purchases are made for use as incentives or premiums. (If you hear the term "special sales," this is it.) *Incentives* are when books are offered to encourage a purchase of something else—for example, an association giving your book away when someone joins. *Premiums* are basically thank-yous, such as a company giving its customers a free copy of your book for the holidays.

But, as the saying goes, there are no free lunches. These big sales typically take months to consummate and, of course, are not guaranteed despite your efforts. But if you make a commitment to pursuing them as a part of your marketing efforts, you will enjoy success. And aside from the payment, these sales are great because they put your book in that many more hands, which spreads the word and leads to more sales.

For more on this topic, check out the comprehensive guide *Beyond the Bookstore* by Brian Jud, the expert on special sales, at www.BookMarketing.com.

Miscellaneous Mistakes

In this section, we'll look at five additional problems that can derail your book project. These are all a case of "you don't know what you don't know." And it's hard to educate yourself about something you don't realize you need to know in the first place. As one of my friends says, "You can only learn what you almost know." In my experience with authors, these five mistakes come up time and time again—but they don't need to. They are truly a matter of just knowing better. And after the next several pages, you will know better.

32: Mis-pricing your book

Aspiring and novice self-publishers often don't understand the breakdown of the cover price of a book (also known as list price), meaning where that money actually goes. Essentially, in trade publishing you have four or five entities: the author, the publisher, the wholesaler or distributor, and the retailer. Each of these gets a cut of the book's cover price. Typically, the publisher will sell copies to a distributor or wholesaler for a discount of around 55%, who then supplies the copies to bookstores at a discount of around 40%. This means, if the copies sell at full cover price, the publisher will get 45% of that amount, the distributor or wholesaler will get 15%, and the bookstore will get 40%.

Although the publisher gets the largest share, it has taken the risk of investing in the book (author expenses, printing, shipping) before a dime is earned, whereas the other entities have no risk (because they can return unsold copies to the publisher). The bookstore gets the second-largest share, but frequently has to discount prices to sell books, especially (ironically) for best-sellers. Lastly, while the distributor or wholesaler gets the least share, it has the advantage of volume, handling many titles to many bookstores. The percentages in this paragraph, by the way, can vary somewhat due to a wide range of factors; however, they are accurate enough for illustrative purposes.

The mistake in this system as it pertains to you is in establishing the cover price of your book. Since everything related to your income trickles down from this seemingly innocuous decision, it can determine the fate of your baby. A price set too low will not leave you with enough of a profit margin; a price set too high will lead to lower sales. Somewhere in the middle is just right, but how do you find that?

There are two methods that should be used together. One is *top-down pricing*, and the other is *bottom-up pricing*. Using the top-down method you seek to price your book according to the market and other books like yours. By researching both, you'll arrive at a range of around two to ten dollars, depending on those price points (a lesser-priced book, say \$9.95-ish, will tend to have a lesser range). What you're doing here is essentially seeing "what the market will bear." Then, you price from the bottom up, starting with your costs to produce the book (prorated per copy) and factoring in the discount structure explained on the previous page. This can be simplified by using an industry-standard ratio of 8 to 1, meaning the cover price should be eight times the cost of printing each copy.

Once you've arrived at your top-down and bottom-up prices, they should be in alignment—ideally, your bottom-up price will fall within the top-down range. If it does, you can safely typeset it on the back cover of your book and begin using it in your promotions. However, if it doesn't, you have a problem. If your bottom-up price ends up being below the top-down range, you have what a friend of mine calls a "happy problem"—you may be able to use the higher (top-down) price and you'll have just that much more profit margin built in. Be alert, however, to the possibility that your market research was faulty. For example, if you were comparing your book of 160 pages to ones with around 300 pages, then of course your pricing will be off. Simply setting your price higher won't do any good because potential readers may perceive your book as not offering enough for the price. In

this instance, you will either need to find a way to add more to what you're offering (an included CD, for example) or price your book lower (in alignment with your bottom-up price) and use this as a competitive advantage.

On the other hand, if your bottom-up price ends up being above the top-down range, you have a greater challenge. You may have too much book (the book's too long), you may have over-designed it (such as too much interior color or complicated production), or you need to shop for more print quotes. If you followed my earlier advice of getting enough quotes, then you'll need to scale your book back. From my experience and observation, this situation usually results from the book being just too long. In this case, you'll need to decide how to cut back. One solution is to divide the book into two or more books, if this is feasible with the nature of the content. Another is to simplify extended passages into bullet points, charts, or other information-design elements that take up less space. And yet another possibility is moving some of the content online, making parts of the book available as bonus digital downloads. A distinct advantage to this latter solution is that it allows you to collect contact information from your readers (they give up their email address to get the downloads) for future research or promotional purposes.

33: Not hiring an editor *and* proofreader

When I'm at publishing conferences or events and the topic of self-publishing comes up (in a negative way), almost invariably the disapproval stems from a lack of quality editing and proofreading. (The second biggest complaint being poor design.)

Proofreading and editing are not the same, and this is important to understand before you embark on your publishing venture. The work of a proofreader is primarily to ensure technical correctness of language—in grammar and spelling—and catch typos. They also look out for consistency (such as making sure the example you give on page 37 matches the same example on page 253), although editors keep an eye on this as well. While proofreaders may offer editorial suggestions for problems like run-on sentences, confusing syntax, and the like, they will generally stick to making sure the “i's are dotted and t's crossed.” And ideally, they'll have few if any editorial suggestions because the manuscript has already been through the hands of a competent editor. A proofreader is the last line of defense, the last step in the manuscript process before it goes to layout.

The job of an editor, on the other hand, can be immensely more involved and complex. In fact, there are several different kinds of editors: developmental editors (who work with the most “raw” of manuscripts, which are sometimes just scraps of ideas); substantive editors (who do significant restructuring and rewriting); and line editors (who are closest to proofreaders in that they do the final editing at the line-by-line level with an eye for clarity, succinctness, and style). Though many editors specialize in one of these areas as their strong suit, most are capable in all—and, odds are, you'll work with just one editor.

Unfortunately, too many self-published authors employ just a proofreader (if one at all) to finalize the manuscript, completely missing the main (and important) function of an editor—to help create a manuscript that's ideally tailored for its intended audience. This can range widely from the looseness of experimental poetry to the rigidity of academic texts. Thus, stylistically, “correctness” is relative to the genre and format. To put it another way, a great editor bridges the gap between your writing and the reader's reception of it. For the reader to have the proper experience of your book (whatever that's meant to be), it needs to be structured a certain way and have a certain voice. Sometimes the gap between your raw writing and its ideal state is significant (and there's more editorial work to be done), and sometimes the gap is small (and the editor's work is minimal).

The problem with editors, from a self-publisher's perspective, is that their work can be expensive. To make matters worse, there's no guarantee as to the cost; it can vary greatly among manuscripts.

Competent editors will do their best to estimate the cost of the job based on samples of your manuscript, but the final cost can still change due to unforeseen problems in the writing. On top of all this, it's rare that a good editing job ends up less than a thousand dollars, with well over a thousand being common.

But before you balk at this expense, remember, you are engaging in a *business* venture (if your goal with your book is to make money). The cost of an editor is no different than the cost of an interior decorator if you were to start a restaurant. Sure, you could decorate it yourself and save money, but the work of a professional is most likely going to create an atmosphere that enhances the dining experience, generates talk about your restaurant, and leads to long-term success. If you haven't yet caught the parallel, an editor helps create the atmosphere in your book with an expert understanding of what will satisfy (or exceed the expectations) of your reader.

One last bit of advice on this topic: don't think the college writing student next door or the retired English teacher your husband knows can pass for a professional editor. While both could be fully competent in the mechanics of the language, and *could be* excellent editors, nothing compares to a professional who works in the field day in and day out. The ability to help create the "atmosphere" in your book and connect with your intended audience comes best with (1) a thorough understanding of that audience and (2) current knowledge of what's expected of your type of book. And it's precisely this skill and expertise that commands the fees good editors deserve and not merely the ability to help craft an *acceptable* book.

34: Not joining publishing-related groups

Before I go any further, I have to confess a bit of bias, being the president of one of the largest regional publishing associations in the country (Publishers & Writers of San Diego). But the reality is, I'm president *because* I know the value of publishing-related groups. I joined mine over ten years ago, and nothing else in my much-longer publishing experience has educated me more (including my bachelor's degree in publishing), not to mention the value of the connections I've made.

Keep in mind, too, that it's important to join groups not just centered around the craft of writing, but also the business of it. Even traditionally published authors are essentially in business for themselves, plying their trade through self-employment. If your area doesn't have a group or association that balances the art and commerce of publishing, look to join an entrepreneurial group. You can also try out the discussion forums online (such as on Yahoo! Groups) dedicated to entrepreneurship.

Here are a few national associations to explore, which have local affiliates:

Independent Book Publishers Association (IBPA)—www.IBPA-online.org

Small Publishers Association of North America (SPAN)—www.SPANNet.org

Small Publishers, Artists, and Writers Network (SPAWN)—www.SPAWN.org

35: Getting a merchant account too soon

This is becoming less and less of a problem, but it still can be costly enough to warrant being a publishing mistake. Back in late 1999, when I was venturing into e-commerce for my college mini-book, there were few options to get paid online and most were fairly expensive for a small start-up. The most common was the merchant account, where you would get essentially the same service as a brick-and-mortar retailer, but with the ability to handle transactions online. Generally, this required a shopping cart on your website and "gateway" software. Not only was this budding technology somewhat clunky compared to the elegant options today, it was pricey—around \$35–50 a month for the merchant account, plus fees per transaction, and a host of other potential fees that banks like to throw

in for fun. In the end, it wasn't uncommon to pay \$50-75 per month, *even if you had no sales*. Additionally, getting a merchant account typically required a high credit score, and banks were especially reluctant to open these accounts for online publishing ventures.

While, as I wrote above, this is not the problem it was ten years ago, I still run into a fair number of authors who are not aware of better alternatives. The prominent ones include PayPal (www.PayPal.com), Yahoo! (www.Yahoo.com), eBay (www.eBay.com), and Amazon Advantage (www.Amazon.com/advantage). With PayPal, you need to have your own website, but with the others you can choose to only use their storefront. These are better than a merchant account because they offer scalable e-commerce, meaning your entry costs are fairly low and ongoing costs will match your sales. (For example, with PayPal, there's no cost to join and you just pay a small fee per transaction.) Then, as your book sales grow and perhaps you expand your catalog of products, you may want to consider upgrading to a more sophisticated shopping cart system (such as www.OneShoppingCart.com) and incorporating a merchant account into your process.

36: Not repurposing your content

“Write it once; sell it in many formats.” That's the word from my friend and colleague Paulette Ensign. Better known as The Booklet Queen, she's been profiled in over a dozen books on publishing for having sold over a million copies of her booklet, *110 Ways to Organize Your Business Life*, without spending any money on advertising. This led her to coach countless other authors on the benefits of booklets as an easier entry point to the world of publishing, hence becoming The Booklet Queen.

But her booklet journey also led to founding and running Tips Products International (www.TipsBooklets.com) to advise authors on repurposing their content. As I mentioned in Mistake #13, booklets are just one of the many formats that your intellectual property can be parlayed into. You can write the totality of what you have to say and then slice and dice it into smaller products, or you can write something small and then grow it into more and more products. This e-book will just be one component of the overall *53 Biggest Self-Publishing Mistakes* program to ultimately include audio, video, and more.

Unfortunately, instead of taking one manuscript and reworking it into multiple products that meet the various needs of different customers, too many authors (myself included) branch out into diffused products on too many topics. As a result, we then need to build a following in multiple areas that often don't overlap in any way. The consequence is the need to promote more, understand different markets, and segregate your online presence (social media profiles, email accounts, websites). Take it from me, it's better (though sometimes less interesting) to stay focused in one subject matter and drill deep into it, selling to the same fans and followers again and again. But hey, at least I'm down to only three—entrepreneurs, authors, and college marketers.

Special Section: Subsidy Publishing Mistakes

While some of the mistakes in this section are specific to subsidy publishing*, many will apply equally to you even if you're truly self-publishing. So, read on. But for those of you who are subsidy publishing or thinking about it, read carefully. As I mentioned in the preface, these points represent the critical considerations related to choosing a subsidy publisher (or choosing not to go that route).

For a comprehensive and specific examination and comparison of subsidy publishers, you can do no better than Mark Levine's book *The Fine Print of Self-Publishing* (www.Book-Publishers-Compared.com). Also, of course, I recommend my new website SelfPubSmart.com, which is the first to feature authors' reviews and ratings of the self-publishing companies they used.

Here are what I consider the 17 biggest mistakes in subsidy publishing. It's worth saying again that some of these can cost you *thousands* of dollars, despite occupying perhaps only a page in this e-book.

* *Most people refer to this as using a self-publishing company or POD publishing.*

37: Not examining the company's business model and how they profit

Subsidy publishers differ in how they make money. Some profit from the fees you pay, some from mark-ups on printing, and others from add-on services. So, while they all have similar menus of options, the key is where the profitability is for them—and where you need to be on the lookout for potential pressure tactics.

For example, some subsidy publishers will produce your book with a high price per unit. Their fees otherwise may not be that bad, and this may be where they'll tout their price-competitiveness; however, if their price per book is too high, you may not be able to sell any or profit sufficiently from them. I've seen subsidy-published books that retail for \$24.95 when other typical books of their kind were \$14.95–\$19.95. If you find yourself in this situation, you'll have a hard time competing, unless your book is exceptional in what it provides (in which case you may have to expend quite a bit of energy and expense educating potential buyers on your book's advantages).

Another mistake of this kind is high fees. Unless you do some comparative shopping, you'll have no idea what "high" means. (And apparently, some subsidy publishers are high on something, with the prices they charge.) One key place to look for this is in design fees. It's not uncommon to find cover-design fees around \$500, and sometimes much more. On the face of it, this sounds reasonable, given that a typical book cover costs about \$750–\$1,500 from a competent freelance designer. But the all-important difference is that the \$500 or more you're paying to the subsidy publisher is for a *canned template design*. The "designer" (usually someone being paid barely more than minimum wage and lacking decent design skills) is simply plopping your book title and your name into an existing template, changing the font and colors, and perhaps dropping in a stock photo. The design will be lacking any inspiration and, more important, will not convey the soul of your book. Just as a competent and fairly paid editor brings out the soul of your manuscript, a competent and fairly paid designer does the same with your cover design. (Incidentally, everything I'm saying here applies equally to the interior design and typesetting of your book.) The best way to deal with this is to pay the fee, though perhaps higher, to a true book-cover designer that you've contracted (just as you would if you were truly self-publishing). Then, have the subsidy publisher use this design. If they don't allow this, don't use them—a key clue they intend to profit significantly from cutting corners on the design.

Add-ons are another profit center for subsidy publishers. They get you in the door with a low cost (“Get published starting at \$299!”) and slowly ratchet up the pressure on you to add services—premium cover design, marketing services, press releases, bookstore placement, and so on. Suddenly, you’re into thousands of dollars when you thought you were paying \$299. It’s kind of like shady auto mechanics who get your car in for an oil change, then find all kinds of things “wrong” with it—and tell you this while the car is up on the lift with pieces of it are laying all around. Most customers aren’t going to tell the mechanic to put everything back together just so they can take the car to another possibly shady mechanic for a second opinion; if the price is within reason, most customers will just suck it up and approve the repairs. So, similarly, the shady subsidy publishers will get you all jacked up and excited about your book being published—perhaps literally through what they say or perhaps just by letting you get knee deep in the process—and then hit you up for add-ons. Thankfully, if you find yourself in this position, unlike being at the mechanic with your car on the lift, you can take a breath and take some time to think what’s best. (This is where belonging to a publishing group of some kind can be very helpful for opinions and feedback. See Mistake #34.)

This is not to say that add-ons are all bad or unnecessary. They may be a wise investment for your project. But use some common sense and *caveat emptor* before agreeing to anything. The book I mentioned, Mark Levine’s *Fine Print of Self-Publishing*, will also allow you to compare these add-ons and understand what’s good and bad. And most important, recognize when a subsidy publisher is pushing for additional services, not in the best interest of your book but for their own good. If you’re dealing with an actual human sales rep, ask for his background and credentials. What’s his experience in publishing? Take notes on what he says and do an Internet search for the terms he mentions. Is he using them correctly? Some of this is a gut check, and if you get any sketchy feeling about the sales rep, decline to continue with that company. Our intuitions, even when we have little knowledge on a subject, are surprisingly accurate, and the caution is rarely a bad thing. There are many subsidy publishers out there. If you walk away from one, there are plenty more to explore. Lastly, as with many sales situations, the single best clue that you’re on shaky ground is when the rep tries to force you into quick decisions. If one says you need to decide (on some “big discount,” for example) that same day, then run the other direction. Likewise, if they start excessively complimenting your book, beware; they’re playing into your dreams.

The final key warning sign that relates to the publisher’s business model and profit center is a high minimum entry price. So, as we’ve seen, some will get you in the door with a low price and then try to upsell you on things that may be unnecessary or overpriced. But there are others that prey on authors who have money and will try to hook you into a big contract from the get-go. This is a red flag that you may be dealing with a vanity press, but you may encounter a true subsidy publisher that uses the same tactic. Somehow, they’ve smelled the dollars in your bank account or your available credit line, and you’re in their sights. We’re talking thousands of dollars here, and once you’ve signed on the dotted line you’re obligated to it. Once again, this is not to say that every subsidy publisher quoting you a big entry price is trying to scam you—it may be accurate for what services you are requesting or discussing. But what you’re looking out for is the implication that this is the only way to go (and there’s pressure to do so). Typically, by the way, this is done through the publisher’s package deals. Most offer something along the lines of Package A, Package B, and Package C, or their Bronze, Silver, and Gold Packages. These will often include services you don’t need or that are overpriced. It seems like you’re getting a lot, but you’re just paying for fluff.

The best way to approach subsidy publishing is to prepare yourself a budget in advance. What are you willing and comfortably able to invest? Is it \$500? Is it \$5,000? Set yourself a limit and ask what the subsidy publisher can do within that budget. Otherwise, it’s easy to get caught up in the excitement of your book being published and allow your budget to bloat. As with gambling, go into the “casino” with a set amount to play and don’t go past that limit.

38: Forgetting that your publishing venture is a *business*

I hesitate to say any mistake in this book is the most important, but this may be it. This mindset—that what you’re doing as an author is a business—is a crucial undercurrent to everything you do and every decision you make.

Now, if you’re not doing this to make money, that’s different. I fully understand that your goals may not be financial, but if earning a living or a few extra bucks is part of your plan, then pay attention.

Most people who fail in any investing situation do so because (a) they don’t know enough about what they’re doing and/or (b) they make decisions based on emotion rather than logic. The good news is that the former cause can be solved with some self-education; the bad news is the latter cause requires some self-awareness and self-control. Humans have a hard time with both. Essentially, you *should* be excited about being in business for yourself and getting your book published, but you *shouldn’t* let that excitement cloud your judgement.

As I’ve said to every author I’ve coached or who’s attended one of my seminars, learn how to run a business, and especially learn the business of publishing. Many aspects of the publishing business are the same as in others—profit and loss, marketing, inventory, sales cycles, and so on. But the world of publishing has its unique traits as well. For example, many aspiring self-publishers are surprised to learn the traditional distribution and retail system of books is actually one of consignment. Book retailers can return books to their distributors, and distributors can return their books to publishers, and publishers can debit the costs of these returns against their authors’ royalties. This is one of the reasons for Amazon.com’s success—it has a sophisticated “just in time” inventory system that only orders what it needs for the near future, based on sales history, and it rarely returns books.

As I mentioned in Mistake #34, the number-one best way to learn the publishing business is by joining a publishing association and attending as many meetings, talks, seminars, and workshops as possible. The Association of American Publishers (www.Publishers.org) and the Independent Book Publishers Association (www.IBPA-online.org) both have annual conferences featuring excellent courses and speakers; likewise for BookExpo America (www.BookExpoAmerica.com), which is the largest book-publishing convention in North America. Additionally, AAP and IBPA have local and regional affiliates that offer numerous educational opportunities.

Of course, being that we’re talking about publishing, I’d be neglectful if I didn’t mention that there are excellent books on this topic you’d be wise to read. While most every significant book on self-publishing contains business advice, the best book dedicated to the business of publishing is Tom Woll’s *Publishing for Profit: Successful Bottom-Line Management for Book Publishers* (www.PubConsultants.com). Make sure to get the latest edition for the most up-to-date information.

Lastly, you’ll also want to look into the Book Industry Study Group (www.BISG.org). This trade association offers a wealth of information as the leading policy and research organization related to publishing in the United States. BISG is *the* source for current trends in the industry and leading thinking on best practices in publishing.

39: Failing to assess how many copies you’ll realistically sell

Most aspiring and new authors don’t realize that the typical title from a subsidy publisher sells fewer than 50 copies. That’s fine if you’re writing a family history, but not good if you seek to earn money from your efforts.

As a result of this lack of awareness, too many authors fall into the hands of a subsidy publisher thinking they will magically sell hundreds or even thousands of copies of their books. And unscrupulous subsidy publishers will exploit this naivety and encourage unbridled author optimism for their own profit. This will be evident in aggressive selling and upselling on the part of the publisher's rep playing on your dreams.

As you're considering your book's future and any publishing path, ask yourself how many copies you can sell to family and friends. Literally write down each and every person's name. What will you have? A list of probably a hundred to two hundred names, at best. Now, multiply that number by 50 percent, because not all of them will buy. (Many will expect free copies.) And the half that buy will most likely do so with some persistent selling on your part, not because you simply announce to your email list that your book is on Amazon. Simply put, it's not an easy road. And at this point we're only talking about maybe a hundred copies to your family and friends! Selling beyond that part will require far more thought and effort.

If you're now discouraged and looking to drag this e-book to your computer's trash bin, don't do it. I'm only taking you through a little realistic thinking to (a) keep you from spending hundreds or thousands of dollars on an ill-conceived plan and (b) to urge you to plan beyond dreamy sales projections. Not knowing anything about your particular book, I would dare say that if it's well written and you do your homework and you market diligently, you can sell at least 500 copies within a year or two of its publication. I've seen this done with obscure poetry, many novels, and a fair amount of non-fiction. Why? Because with the reach of social media and the aforementioned "long tail," there are 500 buyers out there for most anything. I'm not saying they'll be easy to reach, but they won't be reachable *at all* unless you put some thinking into this ahead of time.

This exercise will reel in unrealistic thinking, curb unwarranted spending, and leave you happier and wealthier in the long run. The best publishing plan, in my opinion, is called "pay as you go." Even if you make less money per book initially (as with selling on Amazon.com, for example), you're better off as long as you're not investing much. There's an old saying: Never shrug off any profit, no matter how small. You may profit little in the beginning, but you'll invest little as well. Then, plan on putting those small profits back into your venture, slowly ramping up as sales improve. And at some point you'll know how your book is going to play out—it may level out at a dozen sales a month or it may level out at a thousand sales a month (but hopefully more).

The great thing about the current era of publishing is that almost no book need be a dud. Because of the unimaginable numbers of people accessible online and the low barrier to distribution and sales, the phrase "out of print" only exists by choice. I mentioned a client of mine who sells about five to ten copies of one of his books on Amazon each month (although sales in the fall months before the holidays are much greater). Naturally, he can't live off the income from this one book, but it does put about a thousand dollars into his pocket each year—*with absolutely no effort on his part*. CreateSpace handles the printing, Amazon handles the sales, and he gets a direct deposit into his bank account each month of anywhere from \$25 to \$400 (in January for December sales). As he says, it pays for his Internet and cell phone costs for the entire year. His goal is to write and publish more of these niche books to eventually cover all his living expenses with what would be completely passive income.

Have I brought you back around to some encouragement? I hope so. As I said, I want to foster realistic thinking before unrealistic spending, but at the same time show you the potential that subsidy publishing (and self-publishing) holds. It's not that your book selling only a hundred copies a year would be bad; it's if you would have spent a few thousand dollars to achieve that. In other words, if you spent \$3,000 to publish a book you end up averaging \$400 income from each year, it would take you over seven years to recoup your investment. Earning a return of 10% on your investment would take over eight years. Those aren't good numbers. A basic bank savings account would probably do better (although would be admittedly more boring and would have no upside potential).

My way of thinking is that you should invest (a) only what you can afford to lose, in case the

book totally tanks or you end up losing interest in it, and (b) what you can recover in three years based on *realistic* sales projections. To bring this full circle, look far beyond your family and friends to determine exactly how you will sell those additional copies each year. For further assistance with this, get the book I suggested in the last mistake—Tom Woll’s *Publishing for Profit*—or one of the many general books on writing a marketing plan.

40: Not knowing your goal and purpose for getting published

You’d be surprised how many authors have no clue *why* they want to be published. (Or maybe, if you’re one of them, you wouldn’t be surprised.) They just head down the path with some vague notion they want to be a published author and that’s that. Sometimes they think it’s money when in fact it’s fame; sometimes they think it’s recognition when it’s actually income. And admittedly, it’s usually some combination of reasons.

But what’s important is to understand your reasons. And equally important, what are your specific goals for being published? (It’s hard to get anywhere if you don’t know where you’re going.) Take a few minutes or more at this point to stop reading and write down your own goals and purpose for getting published. (Oh, who am I kidding—of course you’ll keep reading. Well, write those goals and purpose down as soon as you can.)

The reason this relates to subsidy publishing (though it’s important for any self-publishing author) is that your goals and purpose may not mesh with what subsidy publishing has to offer. A prime example of this is getting into bookstores, certainly one of the most common goals of authors. A subsidy publisher will NOT get you into bookstores. Sure, it *can* happen, but they will lead you to believe it *will* happen, and that’s the dangerous misleading you can fall victim to. What’s especially bad about the shady subsidy publishers is how they will lead you to believe one thing, do another, and you won’t be able to hold them accountable. The reason is, they will say it in a clever way that holds no responsibility, and they’ll back it up in the contract with legal wording that absolves them. For example, Subsidy Publisher X states: “We will put your book in the systems of Barnes & Noble and Borders stores from coast to coast!” A hopeful and naive author can easily skim over that statement and hear in her mind, “We will put your book in Barnes & Noble and Borders stores from coast to coast!” The semantics are critical here. (It always makes me laugh when someone says, “It’s just semantics.” *What?* Semantics can be very important. But I understand that statement usually means the person can’t defend their argument any further and are attempting to change its direction.)

The fundamental reality is that the number of books published far exceeds the capacity of even the biggest book superstore. If the biggest Borders (approximately 120,000 titles carried in the store) emptied its shelves and started stocking every new book published (an average of *800 per day*), it would run out of room in about five months. Five months! And they’d keep coming. But bear in mind that there are *over seven million* titles in the Borders database, not counting those new 800 relentlessly published each and every day. So, to put it frankly, it’s very hard to get into the bookstores. And we’re not even talking about the advantage a major or traditional publisher has over a subsidy publisher (huge), the fact that shelf space is paid for by publishers (your subsidy publisher will not because it’s expensive), and the simple economics that bookstores only want to carry books that sell well. Their accounting and inventory system is so sophisticated that they know exactly how well each book needs to sell to earn its “rent” for that slice of shelf space, as well as its slice of the overhead of running that bookstore. In short, if a book even makes it into the store, it had better start selling noticeably within just a few weeks or so; otherwise, any copies on the shelf will be returned to the distributor and another book will take its place. Remember, there are 800 new ones every day that

may sell better.

The bottom line is that subsidy publishers will put your book in the *system* (what they actually said they'd do), which simply makes it available for special-ordering at the bookstore. But in reality, very few people do that. After all, what's the point when you can just order it online?

Aside from getting into the bookstores (which, by the way, I fully understand... I still check each bookstore I go into to see if they're carrying any of my books), most authors cite money as a primary goal for getting published. And again, this may not fully mesh with the world of subsidy publishing. Or more accurately, it then makes a difference which subsidy publisher you choose. If you haven't already read the previous mistake, do so to get my thoughts on this and understand some of the economics behind subsidy publishing. But in short, you can make anywhere from negative money (a loss) to decent money, and the details of the publisher's contract and program will determine much of the outcome. (Ultimately, your promotional efforts will be the greatest factor in your book's success, but even the best promoter in the world can't overcome a bad publishing deal to begin with.)

So, what goals and purposes are subsidy publishers good for? Well, in general, I'd say a few. For most books:

- being test-marketed;
- intended for a limited distribution (such as a family history);
- that will solely be printed on demand; and
- where a small passive income is the only desire.

And even these situations don't lead to a "must do" for subsidy publishing; they are only best-case scenarios that *lend themselves* to subsidy publishing. Your specific circumstances, your budget, and the details of any given publisher's contract will ultimately decide whether your goals and purpose fit with subsidy publishing.

41: Not test-marketing *first*

I mention test-marketing in the last mistake as one way subsidy publishing is useful (if the entry price is reasonable). It's not the only way to test-market a book, but it can be a good one. Regardless, if you're looking to go this route (or any self-publishing route), test-market your book first. This simply means dipping your toe in the water before jumping in. It's easy to spend a lot of money publishing a book, but it's even easier to lose a lot of money. As an old industry joke goes, the best way to end up with a million dollars in publishing is to start with two million.

Test-marketing means producing the least expensive version of your book, usually in a limited quantity, and putting it out to a representative cross-section of its potential readership. This could be done with a simple PDF file of the manuscript in a basic book-like layout, a no-frills printed and bound version, or even just the Word document your manuscript is in. A lot depends on the final intended format—if the physical book itself will be important (a full-color children's book, for example), then you'll want to get as close to that as possible. If the content is more important than format, a simple Word doc or PDF may be just fine. And of course, consider who will be reading and reviewing your test version and put it in a format that's convenient for them.

Test-marketing is not enough, however, to see whether your book will *sell*. In fact, many marketers believe there's no such thing as "test-marketing" when it comes to selling your book—that will be known once the book is actually selling. In other words, either it will or it won't, or it will more or less, and you won't really know until a price is on it and it's out there for the world's consideration. Many times in test-marketing, the seller will ask the subject how much he would pay for the product—and it's been shown time and again that people overstate what they would pay. They may be afraid of offending the test-marketer (if they know each other personally), or they may be attaching a higher value because it causes them no pain in the pocketbook. Whatever the case, test-marketing

usually isn't definitive when it comes to pricing. Instead, use it more to refine your content, marketing message, and format.

My college mini-book is a good case study. Published January 1, 2000, it was created to help students maximize their grade-point averages and was based on my personal experience in college. (On a larger level, the mini-book was actually intended to be a test itself—of the content for an eventual book. So it didn't occur to me to test-market the mini-book at first; but it happened organically.) As I set about to promote it, I assumed (for no good reason, by the way) that the primary buyers would be students. My marketing and PR efforts were directed toward student publications and websites. The website for the mini-book was geared toward students (cool and irreverent). And it was priced for individual student purchases (\$4.95). After a while, I began to wonder why it wasn't selling well. Orders were coming in, but not at the level or pace I had expected. But then I noticed something interesting.

Because this was a mail-order situation, I was personally processing, packing, and shipping each purchase—and I saw that many buyers had return addresses on their envelopes indicating they were attorneys, business owners, accountants, and other typically financially savvy *parents*. The students weren't ordering; their parents were. It was a major “Duh!” moment. Of course the students cared less about their academics... most weren't paying for it. Their parents were. And their parents had a better perspective on the value of a high grade-point average and solid college experience in general. (Not surprisingly, college grads earn a significantly higher income on average than college drop-outs.) So, I sent out a survey to the hundreds of purchasers I'd had at that point, and the results were clear: a whopping 97 percent of the purchasers were parents or older family members (aunts, uncles, older siblings) who were giving the mini-book to the students as a gift.

I suddenly realized I'd been unwittingly test-marketing my mini-book, and it needed a dramatic shift in its promotions. I redirected my marketing and PR efforts towards publications, media outlets, and online sources that were aimed toward financially savvy parents. As a result, my mini-book was recommended two years in a row by the editors of *Bottom Line Personal*, a publication with 2.5 million readers in the ideal demographic. The orders flooded in.

Now, in the interest of full disclosure, that mini-book was not a subsidy-publishing situation. I was having it printed and stored in the completely traditional sense; print-on-demand (the method of most subsidy publishers) was not really prevalent at that point. However, it does reveal the very valuable lesson of test-marketing. Though I had done it by accident, the results were nonetheless critical. And of course, I should've been test-marketing to begin with. It was dumb luck in some ways that it all happened as it did. (I fully remember first noticing that one envelope with the word “Attorney” after the sender's name.) So, do as I say, not as I did!

Lastly, while individual well-written feedback is what you want and hope for, be sure to give your testers an easy way to offer their opinions in the form of a survey. A quick way to do this is at www.SurveyMonkey.com, where anyone can set up a basic ten-question online survey at no cost (or a more extensive one for a low fee). Then, all you need to do is provide your testers with a link to that survey for their feedback (while, of course, welcoming more thorough feedback via email).

42: Not being able to set your book's price

All subsidy publishers will have a minimum price of some sort for your book; after all, it has to at least cover the cost of printing, even if you don't care to earn a dime. But where things get dangerous is when they set the cover price, and more specifically, when they set it too high.

The cover price of your book can make or break it (see Mistake #32). While there's a given range buyers will accept—based on the book's format, size, page count, subject matter, and content—there is a price point at which they'll be unlikely to buy. You don't want your book to be near that.

Spend some time strolling around your favorite bookstore and Amazon.com to get a sense of the price range of books that match yours on the aspects listed above. Then, analyze those books from the low end of the range to the high end. See if you can ascertain why their prices are different. Sometimes this may not be evident and could only be a result of the publisher's internal economics; other times it will be clear why one book is more or less expensive than another.

Armed with this information, you'll be in a better position to set your cover price.

43: Not carefully considering the cost per unit

In addition to the last mistake, beware of any minimum pricing the publisher may set. For example, they might not set the retail price, but if they set a minimum wholesale price that's too high, you and retailers won't be able to make enough money between the wholesale and cover prices. Alternately, their discount schedule may be outside the industry standards, again leading to the inability of retailers to sell the book.

These are two of the situations that cause bookstores to basically reject subsidy-published books outright, which leads us to Mistake #44....

44: Overlooking or downplaying the difficulty getting into bookstores

I went into fair length earlier about why subsidy publishing doesn't mesh with bookstore sales, But it can't be emphasized enough that this is something you simply cannot expect. If getting into bookstores is important or necessary for you, then you need to explore getting a traditional book deal or truly self-publishing.

"But what if my book is a blockbuster?" you may ask. "What if I can get it to sell enough to catch the bookstores' attention?" Unfortunately, these things almost don't matter. Even if you were to generate substantial interest and sales in your book, you'll have many factors working against you in the bookstore channel. Unconditional returns are the norm and significant discounts are expected—and most every subsidy publisher flat out fails when it comes to these aspects. Their models are just not set up this way and it's not how they make their money.

All that said, if for some reason your heart is set on subsidy publishing and being in bookstores, and you're convinced you can sell a ton, then at least find the right publisher. Find one that's "bookstore friendly" with regard to their discounts and returns. One way to do this is to ask bookstore managers what subsidy publisher(s) they recommend.

45: Failing to check if you have final choice over look and format

Yet another drawback of many, if not most, subsidy publishers is your lack of creative control over your book. This is typically the case with traditional publishers as well; however, they have a better track record in this area. (For one reason, they make money from actually *selling* your book, not selling you the services to create your book. So, your book needs to look its best.)

The look and format you'll likely get from a subsidy publisher is *possibly* something decent, but far more likely something that's merely adequate (and maybe not even that). Rarely, will you get something stunning. So, the issue of your ability to object to their creative choices (without paying unne-

essary fees) is paramount. This is your baby we're talking about. And yet sadly, too many authors end up with something they can't be proud of, or worse, a book that's unsellable.

Ask and confirm (that is, read the contract) as to exactly what involvement is afforded you in the creative process and what fees are associated with it. It's perfectly reasonable for them to charge you if you want to endlessly pick at details, but you should not have to pay for any inadequacies on their part. And if worse comes to worst and you need to walk away, you shouldn't have to pay for work never performed.

46: Using their assigned ISBN versus your own

You may recall from earlier that one fundamental difference between subsidy publishing and true self-publishing is who owns the International Standard Book Number, your book's unique industry identification number. If you own it, you're self-publishing; if they own it, you're not (and they are listed as the publisher on record). More than a mere technicality, this detail can be immensely valuable in the future.

Let's say you decided to go with a subsidy publisher and created a little success for your book. Sales are pretty good, and it's no longer economically smart to stay with the publisher. (They're taking too big a cut.) If they had assigned an ISBN to your book, then you've got a bit of a problem: The ISBN and your book's title will likely remain in the book industry's master database under the subsidy publisher's listing. You now need a new ISBN (no big deal) and a new title (possibly a big deal).

If you've built quite a following and reputation for your book, and now the title needs to change, this could be huge. Once its presence has proliferated throughout the Internet, it's hard to modify. Some people will get old information that may lead them to think your book is out of print or unavailable, others may be confused about the two different versions, and the connection between the two (same) books can be lost. For example, all those great reviews on Amazon will stay with the old version. In short, all your hard-earned marketing results can evaporate.

There are work-arounds of sorts if this were to happen, but it's far better to avoid the potential from the beginning—get your own ISBN (see Mistake #6) and go with a subsidy publisher that allows you to use it (www.CreateSpace.com and www.Lulu.com are two examples). In this case, the subsidy publisher is no longer your actual publisher (you are), but rather functions as your printer and distributor.

47: Failing to thoroughly review the contract

Not being an attorney, I can only comment generally about this mistake—and try to impress on you how absolutely critical it is. Every author who's been fully or partially ripped off by a subsidy publisher has in some way not reviewed or understood her contract. I can only guess a big part of this is laziness; after all, I receive updated terms of service from my cell phone provider, credit card issuer, and other companies fairly often, and I can't honestly say I read through them all. Same goes for those online terms where you hit the "Agree" or "Disagree" button before continuing. I suppose we're just desensitized in some ways... we see too many of these to care enough.

But back to the point. You need to thoroughly review your publishing contract. If there are things you don't understand, ask and then double-check them with independent sources. It's also a good idea to enlist the assistance of a competent book coach or consultant to review your contract. Even if the coach isn't an attorney, he will at least have a sufficient understand of publishing terms and norms to spot anything suspicious or to be avoided. Of course, if you can consult an appropriate attorney, that's the best course of action.

In general, however, you need to look out for a few key things:

Term of the contract—You want either the shortest term you can get or no term at all. This is the time period for which you are obligated to the contract. As with fitness centers, auto leases, equipment rentals, and the like, publishers usually shoot for the longest term they can. It's in their best interest. Conversely, it's in your best interest to keep the term as short as possible or non-existent.

Backing out—Related to the term is your ability to exit the arrangement at any time with no penalty. One trick in a contract is to include an early-termination fee. While this is better than no early-termination option, don't accept such a fee. There are plenty of subsidy- or self-publishing options without that.

Fees—There are too many possibilities to mention, but in general you want to make sure there are no hidden fees, no fees contradict what you were either told or understood to be the case, and that the fees are spelled out clearly. Again, if you don't understand something, clarify and double-check it.

Add-ons—Look for any of these that may have slipped into the contract. It can happen by honest mistake or it can be done intentionally. Either way, beware of these. As with other details, seek out any inconsistencies or contradictions in the contract. Because these contracts are almost always written from templates, it's easy for one detail in one place to not match in another place, or for things to be present or missing when they shouldn't be. The publisher's rep should be willing and quick to fix these. If there's any hesitancy or an attempt to talk you out of it, that's a red flag.

Ownership—Where is the line drawn with regard to ownership of your book's design, title, production files, and promotional materials? Stay away from publishers that will put all aspects of ownership in their favor. At the very least, insist that these rights transfer to you if you end the publishing arrangement.

Corrections—Two specific weak points in a contract relate to corrections in the production process. Look out for excessive costs (which you'll know by comparing publishers), and be especially careful of the publisher charging you for fixing mistakes their people make. I know it sounds crazy, but it happens. Scrutinize this part of the contract and make sure it defines specifically how corrections will be handled and who will pay for them.

Your income—Last, but not least, pay special attention to how you will earn money. There are many bait-and-switch tactics (where you're promised one thing and then contracted for another), and these frequently involve your income. I'll go more into this in Mistake #49, but this is an area of your contract that requires your careful attention to detail.

It's also important to prepare for the contract. In other words, keep a record of all communications (notes about phone conversations, emails, print-outs of the publishers' web pages) leading up to the contract stage. Then, once you're reviewing the contract, be sure to match your records against the details of the contract and be quick to resolve any inconsistencies.

Lastly, remember to get Mark Levine's book *The Fine Art of Self-Publishing* (he's an attorney) for a detailed analysis of subsidy publishing companies and their contracts. This is a must-read, at the very least when you get to the point of reviewing your publishing contract.

48: Not seeing if they have an offset option for higher print runs

Subsidy publishing mostly revolves around the print-on-demand (POD) model. As your book is needed for inventory (by you, Amazon, or wherever), copies are printed and shipped. While POD has its drawbacks, I wouldn't want to go back to the time when it wasn't an option. It has truly opened the door for many books that would've otherwise never seen the light of day.

It is not, however, cost-effective when you start getting into larger print runs. Although the economics are changing, it's typically better to go with offset printing (POD is digital printing) once you need more than 500 copies at a pop. You may need to print 750 or 1,000 to get a decent per-book cost, but you'll do better in the long run than with digital printing for this quantity.

So, the question is, will your subsidy publisher be able to offer this in the future if the demand for your book grows great enough? Whether or not you can imagine a day when selling a thousand copies of your book is a reality, you want to leave this option open. Going with a publisher who can't meet this need is just shooting yourself in the foot before you start running. Of course, if you *know* you won't sell more than a hundred copies for whatever reason, then this is not really a consideration.

49: Not understanding your payment— “author profit” versus “royalties” versus “net payment”

One easy way to rip off unsuspecting authors is to play a shell game of sorts with how you get paid. The accounting of your payments can get murky with trade publishers as well, given the variables of returns, remainders, author copies, bulk purchases, and more. But it's generally assumed the trade publishers have honest intentions, whereas this is less certain with subsidy publishers. At the very least, *some* are willing to mislead you in this area.

It all begins with exactly what your earnings are called, what they are a percentage of, and what that percentage is. Whether they call it author profit, royalties, or net payment, you first need to know what it's derived from—what is it the percentage of? If it's the cover price, you're in good shape; if it's the difference between their cost per book and the cover price you set, you're in good shape. In both of those instances, you have solid numbers you can rely on. But if they say it's a percentage of net sales (and these can be variable), that's not so good. For example, they may give a certain discount to Amazon for its sales, a different discount to another channel, and yet another to a third outlet. Ideally, if this were the case, your payment statement would be clearly spelled out and segregated among these sales, but it just makes things less clear. I don't know about you, but if I know I'm definitively earning \$6.52 (or whatever) per book, I'm more motivated. And of course, regardless of how the numbers are derived, be sure you're getting a clear percentage and that this matches what's in the contract, if you get to that point.

One key scam I've noticed is subsidy publishers who promise big “royalties” when, in fact, these royalties are based on a unrealistically high retail or cover price. For example, they may say you'll earn \$10 per book (which is very exciting compared to the typical buck or so from a trade deal), but that figure comes from a cover price of \$29.95—when your book is really more of a \$12.95–\$15.95 book. So, as you're examining all the parameters of how and what you'll be paid, look at all the angles and remember... if it sounds too good to be true, it probably is.

50: Thinking you'll get good media reviews

Just as the opportunities for getting into bookstores are dwindling in all corners of publishing, significant media reviews are getting harder and harder to obtain. The main reason for this (aside from the astounding number of books being published) is the lack of book reviews in newspapers. Every major city's paper at one time contained a weekly book-review page (and in some cases, multiple pages). This would usually be in the Sunday paper. And the biggest of papers had entire book sections, such as the *New York Times* still does. Now, however, reviews are down to almost nothing in the grand

scheme of things, as most papers have dropped them entirely. And radio and TV have never offered much in the way of book reviews.

But this is understandable, however distressing it is to many publishing long-timers. The reality is, people now want “peer” reviews, such as you see on Amazon. (The same goes with movie reviews, which are down.) While our peers may not be as eloquent and knowledgeable as a professional book or film reviewer likely is, we get the benefit of *numerous* reviews from which we form our own opinions. Any given review may not be accurate or helpful, but the totality of them (if there are enough) is where the value lies. So, aside from the economics of the newspaper business being what it is, the demand for professional book reviews is simply less.

So, the result, as it pertains to this mistake, is that it’s hard to get “real” media reviews of most any book, and it was always hard (if not impossible) to get them if you were a subsidy- or self-published author. The media has always looked down on self-publishing as a sort of bastard step-child of the industry.

Your focus, then, should be on getting these peer reviews, especially by leading bloggers. The truth is, within a given niche, a leading blogger will carry far more sway than a general book reviewer. There’s an assumption, for example, that such a blogger knows more about their subject and therefore has something more valuable to say about it—and this is almost certainly true. (You can seek out blogs, and thus bloggers, related to your topic by going to BlogSearch.Google.com or www.Tech-norati.com.)

As I wrote a few paragraphs ago, peer reviews on book sites are also worth seeking out. Ask everyone who buys your book to go to www.Amazon.com, www.Borders.com, and www.BarnesAndNoble.com and post a review. It’s a balance of quantity and quality—you want a lot of reviews, but you also want some substantive ones. And don’t worry about negative reviews if any happen (unless you get a lot); a few sprinkled in makes everything seem more legit. As a funny aside, I had an author email me a few years ago in a panic because someone had posted a negative review of her book on Amazon. She wanted to know how it could be deleted. The ethics of doing that aside (it wasn’t a libelous or grossly offensive review), I told her it wasn’t a bad thing at all. Her book had gotten 27 reviews and only this one was bad. Most anyone is going to see that one as an aberration.

51: Not researching the company on Amazon.com

There’s a wealth of information, both obvious and not so obvious, on Amazon.com. I consider it a primary research tool with regard to book marketing. As you’re seeking out and comparing subsidy publishers, take advantage of Amazon to do a little detective work.

I’ve mentioned elsewhere the concern about what design quality you’ll get for your book’s cover and interior. One way to (hopefully) alleviate this is to look at a publisher’s work. First, do a book search on Amazon based on the company’s name. Once you have those results, check out their book covers and then use the “Search Inside this Book” feature to see the interior layouts. How appealing are these to you? Do they look professional? Even though you may not have a design education, you will probably get a gut sense if something doesn’t look good, especially if this is a consistent problem with a particular publisher. Of course, design is subjective, but there is a certain “you know it when you see it” aspect to bad design. Additionally, you may want to have a friend who’s a designer (if you know one) look at the covers and interiors with you.

Take a look at the publisher’s books’ sale rankings as well. Although you don’t get to see exactly how many copies have sold, you’ll get a sense of things. Are the books ranked near the top of any categories? Are their overall rankings in the 10,000 range, 100,000 range, or worse? Compare these rankings to books you know that aren’t best-sellers. For example, take a book you purchased a few years ago, then compare its ranking with those you’ve found from the subsidy publisher.

Review the reviews. See what customers are saying about the publisher's books. They will most certainly point out glaring deficiencies, bad content, poor design, and so on. Of course, if you find an abundance of books with no reviews at all, that's not a good sign. Does the book have an industry review? While not every book (even those traditionally published) gets an industry review, if you find some for a subsidy publisher's books that's usually a good sign—if, of course, the review is good. It means they've done a bit of marketing and PR legwork to get that review, or the author has.

Lastly, look at the section of the Amazon listing where it indicates what percentage of customers end up buying that book versus comparable ones. This will give you a clue as to how the book stands up against the competition. Ideally, most customers ended up buying the book you're investigating, and the percentage is significant. If that's not the case, hopefully the book is second-ranked but the percentage is similar to the most-purchased book (say, 34% versus 39%). As you look over the entirety of a good sampling of any given publisher's books, you should get a sense of how they stand.

52: Failing to contact some of the publisher's authors

If you were planning to go to a chiropractor for the first time, wouldn't you want to get some feedback from his existing or previous clients? Why not do the same with your prospective subsidy publishers?

The funny thing is, authors are prepared to spend hundreds or thousands of dollars on their book and yet they don't bother to do a "background check" on the company. I've only met two authors who talked to others with the publisher first. But now you'll be another of those savvy authors who do so.

The great thing about this is, the authors are almost always easy to reach—their contact info is readily available and they're eager to hear from possible fans. You can find their info one of many possible ways: doing a "search inside the book" on Amazon; on their Amazon profile pages, if applicable; on the publisher's website; doing a Google search on their names; or contacting the publisher. (On this last note, of course, don't tell them *why* you want to contact the author.)

I suggest reaching at least five of each prospective publisher's authors. I know this sounds like a lot of work (three publishers equals fifteen authors), but remember, you're looking at investing *hundreds or thousands of dollars*, not to mention your dreams. As eager as you are to get published, this step is crucial to ensuring you don't make a potentially colossal mistake, the consequences of which could derail your project and cost you far more time than this research takes.

A side benefit of this approach is that you could make a valuable contact (or two) in these other authors. If one or more of them have written on a topic similar to yours, there may be the potential to cross-promote. Remember, one great thing about books is that they aren't exclusively competitive—meaning customers are likely to have more than one book on a given topic, unlike exclusively competitive products of which most people only own one (vacuum cleaner, dishwasher, hairdryer). This means, instead of seeing other authors as potential competitors, see them as potential promotional partners. Remember from Mistake #27 that your job is to promote your topic as much as it is to promote your book. If you're seen as an expert who is interested in educating your customers, fans, and followers—which means providing more than just what's in your book—you'll go a lot farther and sell many more books.

53: Ignoring that *you* are responsible for marketing

The biggest misconception in publishing among new and aspiring authors is that the publisher will promote your book for you. This ranges from mostly to totally false. If you are Dan Brown, James Patterson, J.K. Rowling, Donald Trump, or President Obama, yes, you will have significant marketing assistance—but even in those instances, the author still carries a fair amount of responsibility in promotions. The only difference is that the publisher will budget a fat amount of money for it, employ a decent public-relations firm to garner media coverage, set up a book tour, dedicate staff to the promotional effort, and more. You, my friend, will be doing it all yourself with a subsidy publisher.

Now, you'll note in the title for this mistake that you are *responsible* for marketing—this doesn't mean you can't hire assistance; it just means the publisher won't provide it for free, and you'll have to make it happen. (This, by the way, is largely true with traditional publishing, in which the publisher will usually do very little on your behalf and may charge you for some of it.)

Knowing the typical new or aspiring author has no clue about and/or inclination toward marketing and promotions, subsidy publishers are quick to offer add-ons and packages to accommodate this. Unfortunately, this is yet another area where you can get taken for a ride. In general, when it comes to these services, I say, "When in doubt, leave them out"—out of the contract, that is. If you can conclude with confidence that the publisher is offering a viable promotional service (say, by talking with other authors from that publisher who were happy with the service) and you can afford it, then it's worth considering. But in reality, the only results these add-ons usually achieve are higher profits for the publisher (much like those extended-warranty plans you can buy at an electronics store). For example, you'll be charged \$350 for a promo kit that costs them 30 minutes to fulfill. Yes, some "expertise" may have gone into that kit, but it's nonetheless very profitable for them to sell, or more accurately, to upsell. The problem is, they rarely have \$350 worth of benefits. Many times, these add-ons are nothing more than template forms and the like (press releases, post cards, email samples, sales letters, etc.) that *may* be customized for your book. In the end, you could've gotten the same thing in a book-marketing book (such as John Kremer's *1,001 Ways to Market Your Book* at www.BookMarket.com) for a fraction of the cost and a little time on your part.

The truth is, absolutely nothing makes up for the marketing and promotion you will do yourself on behalf of your book. Yes, as I said, you can hire assistance to some degree, but you are still the star of the show. It begins and ends with you. When people buy into your book, either literally or figuratively, they are buying a chunk of your knowledge, expertise, or abilities. So, as you prepare a budget for your publishing venture, be sure to include marketing. Familiarize yourself with the various means and costs of promotion (that can be found in books such as Kremer's or Tom Woll's *Publishing for Profit* at www.PubConsultants.com), and factor these in to what you can afford. Too many authors only think of the printing and production (and subsidy-publisher fees), and then nothing is left for the most important part: promotions.

One last tip on this topic: Consider hiring a virtual assistant (VA) for things you don't need to do yourself. That \$350 for the publisher's marketing package I mentioned could be better used to contract a VA, especially one who's experienced in promotions, marketing, or public relations. For example, this amount could buy you Kremer's book plus roughly 20 hours of a VA's time, which would probably generate a better return on your investment than the publisher's marketing package could. You can find virtual assistants by doing an online search for them or by contacting one of the publishing associations listed in Mistake #34. For an enlightening discussion of "outsourcing your life" to VAs, check out Tim Ferriss's *The 4-Hour Workweek* (www.FourHourWorkWeek.com).

One Last Big Tip

While I've provided you with the 53 biggest self-publishing mistakes (and many other little mistakes within them), nothing can replace expert advice tailored to your individual project and needs. No, I'm not selling you on my services—I'm happily busy as an author, "content-preneur," and professional speaker. What I am suggesting, however, is that you consider hiring a book coach or consultant, also sometimes known as a "book shepherd." Their job is to take you from A to Z through the process of getting your book published, or to help you on any specific part of the process.

Obviously, their services aren't free, but they more than make up for that when it comes to the necessary expertise to navigate the waters of self-publishing. As I hope I've impressed upon you, self-publishing can be very costly. It's costly enough to do correctly, and even more so to do incorrectly. The added investment of a coach or consultant is truly money well spent; consider it a form of insurance.

Now, before I scare you off with visions of attorney-like fees of hundreds of dollars per hour, rest assured that there are many ways to make use of a publishing coach or consultant without breaking your budget. I've been hired for as little as \$50 to provide professional feedback on prospective titles and cover designs of authors' books, both of which are crucial to success (Mistakes #1 and #2). And I've been on a \$5,000-per-month retainer to dedicate time to an author's branding and marketing efforts. But most of the time, the work falls somewhere in between. It's best to decide what you can afford and then talk with the coach/consultant about what can be done within your budget. If your money is tight, just a one-hour consultation by phone on an as-needed basis can greatly help to keep your project on track or alert you to problem areas. I've had authors come to me (after a costly mistake has been made) who could've saved hundreds of dollars had they only spent \$75 on an email exchange with me. Don't be penny wise and pound foolish.

So, how do you find a book coach, consultant, or shepherd, given that my sage brilliance is currently unavailable? Aside from the obvious Google search, check with other self-publishing authors you know, ask around any publishing or writing groups you belong to, and contact the publishing associations listed in Mistake #34. Also, self-publishing über-expert Dan Poynter has a good list of some at his site, www.ParaPublishing.com.

Conclusion

Self-publishing has risen to unprecedented heights and ease in just the past several years. And what you can do with your manuscript or book idea now would've been nearly unimaginable 22 years ago when I self-published my first “real” book. Not since Johannes Gutenberg revolutionized moveable type and invented the mechanical printing press in the 15th century has the world experienced such a dramatic shift in the realm of publishing. You are nothing less than exceptionally fortunate to be living when you are, as an author or aspiring author.

But as with all things, with potential comes mistakes. One thing that sets apart successful people is the ability to recognize, learn from, and avoid mistakes. With this book, it's been my goal to help you with the recognition and learning part of that; now you can go forth and avoid becoming a publishing casualty.

As I shared in the introduction, I truly love publishing. I always have. My favorite project in first grade was creating a “book” about the Pilgrims and Thanksgiving (at least the propagandized version of that history). I wrote, illustrated, decorated, and binded that book (with yarn), and while all the other students had to do something of the same, I doubt any of them loved that like I did—and I doubt any of them still have their book as I do. Publishing combines writing, art, teaching, commerce, and creativity in a way nothing else can compare. Albeit unknowingly, George Bernard Shaw perhaps best captured the essence of publishing as we know it today:

If you have an apple and I have an apple and we exchange these apples, then you and I will still each have one apple. But if you have an idea and I have an idea and we exchange these ideas, then each of us will have two ideas.

Of course, he was not speaking of 21st-century publishing, but his words are fully applicable today. Instead of the top-down publishing era we're exiting, in which a few authors rose to hold the megaphone while the rest of us sat and tuned in, the paradigm is flattening. Your ideas can be carried through books to a global audience; conversely, you can learn from, be enlightened by, or be entertained by the ideas of a global community of creators. Just like the Internet and Web that have made this possible, publishing can now be envisioned as a three-dimensional, web-like network throughout which books flow, instead of the more-vertical, linear, and one-way channel it has been.

Perhaps the most exciting part of this revolution is the viability of niche publishing. As I mentioned earlier, I have a former client who's on his way to making a living from the passive income from seven to ten books. In the dying model of publishing, it would've been likely impossible to get all those books published. Their income streams wouldn't come close to what any given publisher would require (especially to justify an offset print run). And even if some publisher or combination of publishers would have taken on those books, the royalties wouldn't come close to the income each produces through self-publishing. Lastly, the traditional publishing process has never been speedy; getting seven to ten books to market from a single author is a two-decade proposition. With self-publishing, it is entirely possible to get all these books to market in three to five years.

This ability to niche and grow rich (or at least earn a living trying) is something you'll want to consider. Broadcasting has been replaced by *nichecasting*. There is a massive economy of scale on the Internet, such that you can find (and be found by) small communities of people who want specific information or entertainment. If you can serve up what they seek, you can build a nice following without having to invest the dollars that traditional advertising and marketing have required (to reach a large but unfocused group of people).

But whether you decide to dive into a niche or set your sights on creating the next *Harry Potter*,

Chicken Soup for the Soul, or *Da Vinci Code* phenomenon, know that everything you need to know about self-publishing is at your fingertips. The mystique behind traditional publishing can be likened to the wizard in *The Wizard of Oz*. He wanted Oz to believe he was all-powerful, and getting an appointment with him was an honor indeed. But now the curtain has been pulled back, and the Good Witch of Self-Publishing has arrived to tell the Dorothy in all of us that we have all we need to get where we want to go. The digital era is our ruby slippers.

So, click your publishing heels three times. Read this book as often as necessary to fully absorb its advice, learn all you can about self-publishing and publishing in general, network with other authors and publishing professionals, and go forth wisely and put your ideas out for the public's consideration. New York may still be the Emerald City, but "Kansas" is not such a bad place to be.

About the Author

ANDREW CHAPMAN has worked in nearly every aspect of publishing for over twenty years—as a writer, editor, designer, typesetter, publisher, consultant, audio-video producer, and author. His first self-published book was released in 1987, and his first traditionally published book was released by Warner Bros. in 1990. Andrew’s real-world experience is backed by a Bachelor’s Degree in Publishing from George Mason University, earned with a perfect 4.0 grade-point average.

He is one of very few authors who have landed three trade-publishing deals in a single year—with two publishers, with and without an agent. Additionally, his writing has earned him several awards, including from *Writer’s Digest* magazine and the San Diego Book Awards.

As a professional speaker, Andrew has delivered over 300 speeches and seminars to thousands of people throughout the United States and four countries overseas. He is a regular speaker at the Independent Book Publishers Association University, as well as a former president of Publishers & Writers of San Diego.

The 53 Biggest Self-Publishing Mistakes is the latest of his seven books and audio books, which includes the 2012 release of *No Brown M&M’s! And Other Entrepreneurial Lessons from over 300 Legends of Rock & Roll*.

In 2012, Chapman also started SelfPubSmart.com, the first website to feature authors’ reviews and ratings of the self-publishing companies they used.

More about Andrew can be found at www.AChapman.com.